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Week-day sermons

WEEK-DAY SERMONS

WEEK-DAY SERMONS

By R. W. DALE, M.A.

ALEXANDER STRAHAN AND CO.
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A PREMONITION.

READER:

"If thou do but read or like these, I have spent "good hours ill: but if thou shalt hence abjure those vices "which before thou thoughtest not ill-favored, or fall in love "with any of these goodly faces of virtue; or shalt hence find "where thou hast any little touch of these evils to clear "thyself, or where any defect in these graces to supply it: "neither of us shall need to repent of our labor."

BISHOP HALL

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PRELIMINARY.

THERE is no reason why these WEEK-DAY SERMONS should not be read on Sundays. They are about every-day life, and some readers may think them "unspiritual;" but is it quite safe to divorce the hours we consecrate to devotion from the hours we spend in the family, the counting-house, and the shop? If Week-days are never thought about on Sundays, will not Sundays be forgotten on Week-days? Would it not be well for every man to spend an hour on the first day of the week thinking over—not the business affairs—but the morality of the other six? God forbid that I should depreciate those lofty acts of the soul, in which it holds

communion with the Father of spirits, meditates on the infinite love of Christ, strives to penetrate more deeply into the mysterious glory of His atonement for sin, and lays open every channel through which those streams of spiritual life and power can flow which have their springs in the living God. Let those who are content with morality and uprightness of conduct, and are indifferent to religious duty, be assured that there is an unearthly peace, a heavenly joy, a blessedness like that of the angels, for every one who has learnt the happy secret of dwelling in the light of the Divine presence. When the heart glows with devout affection, and the spirit sinks in prostrate worship, and the eye gazes on the glory of Christ, Heaven comes down to earth, and the promise of immortal bliss begins to be fulfilled.

But in the sense in which some good people use the word "spiritual," the Bible is in many parts extremely unspiritual. They say themselves

that they must "spiritualize" many passages in the Old Testament, and some in the New, to find any such instruction and profit as they are always asking for. They forget that the words of inspired men were not written to be thought of only on Sundays; that they were not written for persons who have nothing to do but to pray. The first lesson that Holy Scripture teaches is unlearnt, if we have not discovered that God is interested in all the affairs of our daily life, and judges us not merely by our prayers and religious affections, but by our works.

There is no occupation in which man can be lawfully engaged, in which he may not see God. The tens of thousands of rough fellows who are working under ground in South Staffordshire, are getting out of the earth the iron God Himself put there. The tens of thousands of men, women, and children in the workshops of Birmingham are melting, moulding, hammering, and stamping the metals God Himself made. It was God who created the cotton-plant

out of which the Lancashire people manufacture their calicoes. It was God who created the silk-worm which spins the cocoon for all workers in silk. The first part of the process in every form of manufacturing industry is done by God. He always finds the material; and that material has been produced by most complicated methods, and by methods which in many cases have taken thousands of years to complete and perfect their results. It is plain that He meant us to employ our hands in honest labour, as well as our lips in thankful praise; that He meant our brains to be active in planning, inventing, and scheming, in relation to this world, as well as our hearts in longing and hoping for the next. He made our bodies of the dust which belongs to the earth, though He breathed into us a higher life, which unites us to Himself. And so the Bible has very much in it about common work, as well as about religious duty. In the "book of remembrance," there are pages not only for our

Sundays, but for every day in the week besides. "The prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord;" "a false balance" is an abomination to Him too. That religion is worthless which has to do only with books of devotion, and not with day-books and ledgers; with pews and churches, and not with counting-houses and workshops; with prayers and sermons, and not with "amusements," "summer holidays," and "Christmas parties;" "the kindly treatment of other men's imperfections" and "the discipline of the body," that we may master our own sins.

In the Ten Commandments there are only four which refer to duties we owe directly to God; there are six which refer to duties we owe to our fellow-men. All through the Bible we are repeatedly reminded that God has His eye upon us at all times; and that to please Him we must "do justly," as well as "love mercy, and walk humbly with our God."

There are some persons who plead, in excuse for their own irreligion, that in secular affairs religious men are no better than other people. If they are not, they ought to be. I believe that, as a rule, they are. If not, how is it that when a religious banker has been guilty of using securities entrusted to his keeping, the whole country rings with his crime, and there is so much sneering and triumph at the expense of religion itself? *We* do not make such a stir when a man who makes no profession of faith in Christ is guilty of the same thing. We do not put articles in our religious newspapers, headed in large capitals, "Doings of an Irreligious Banker." How is it that if a minister is betrayed into grievous sin, the scandal of his fall is kept alive for years? If another man commits the same offence it is soon forgotten.

Hundreds of men were hung for forgery in the last century; I doubt whether ten of my readers could tell me the name of any one of them except Dr. Dodd.

Of the people that fill our gaols, that are sent to our penal colonies, that are brought up before the magistrates for drunkenness and disorder, I wonder whether one in a thousand is a communicant in any Christian church.

However this may be, it is plain that if people who profess to be Christians give short weight and short measure, it is not the fault of the Bible. If a shopman who robs the till on Saturday night goes to church on Sunday morning, he hears nothing at church to make him think that his crime against man is no sin against God. If a father who professes to be religious gives way to a bad temper, and "provokes his children to wrath," it is not from the Bible he learns to do it; if he read his Bible properly he would know better. If a master professes to be a Christian, and is guilty of using harsh and violent language to the people he employs, do not blame his Christian faith: *that* teaches him to "forbear threatening," reminds him that he has

"a Master in heaven," and that "there is no respect of persons with Him."

It is the shallowest and weakest reasoning in the world to argue against religion because some religious people do wrong; their religion condemns their wrong-doing as heavily as human censure can condemn it. If they are earnestly religious, they will gradually become better.

I cannot close these preliminary words without recalling the solemn truth, that God's laws for our conduct to each other are a revelation of His own character, and are in strict analogy to the laws which determine His own action towards His creatures. He is merciful as well as just; but *now* is the time for mercy. The time is coming when He will judge every man; and when He judges He will judge righteously.

We might well tremble in the anticipation of the hour when, one by one, we shall wait for the Divine sentence on our deeds; but we know that the critical

act of the soul, in God's sight, is its acceptance or rejection of the mercy of the Lord Jesus; and that if we trust in Him we shall not only be justified by faith in this world, but shall be so strengthened for all good works that God Himself, when He looks at our deeds, will be able to say, "Well done, good and faithful servants; enter ye into the joy of your Lord." But to no man, whatever his faith, who has not done well, will God say "Well done."

I.

THE USE OF THE UNDERSTANDING IN KEEPING GOD'S LAW.

IT is a very common impression that what men require to keep God's commandments is right-heartedness, and nothing more; that the Understanding has very little to do with it. This is a grave mistake, and a very mischievous one. Doing right, in a world like this, is a science, or at any rate an art; mere instinct is not enough to guide us. Men do not paint beautiful pictures or carve noble statues without learning how to do it; they must have genius to begin with; but they have to *think* about their work, to study great models, to observe how other

artists have succeeded, to investigate the causes of their own failures; and it is an advantage to them to read what has been written about the principles which every painter and every sculptor must practically remember, if the creations of his hand are to be a lasting treasure to the world.

To cover human life with beauty, to carve it into nobleness, requires thought as truly as to cover canvas with lovely forms, or to make the hard and unwilling marble assume a shape of majesty and grace. We all have to *learn to do well.* Right thought has very much to do with right conduct.

When the Psalmist prayed, "Give me understanding, and I shall keep Thy precepts," he did not mean, —Make me *feel* how awful a thing it is to provoke Thine anger, or how lovely goodness is, or what ingratitude and shame there would be in breaking Thy law, but "give me *understanding*," that I may know how to keep it; then "I will observe it with my whole heart." His purpose, his desire, his resolution

was right; but he wanted to learn what the will of God really was. The head must assist the heart, if we are to live a good life.

When our circumstances are simple and uncomplicated, there is no great danger of our mistaking the right for the wrong, if we have ordinary intelligence and have lived among people of tolerably good character. But there are many moral questions which are extremely difficult to settle; there are many others which men in certain conditions are very likely to settle inaccurately.

Take, for instance, the dreadful system of slavery, which seems to us so black and terrible and appalling a wickedness, that few Englishmen can speak of it calmly or without indignation. There is no doubt that hundreds and thousands of just and kind-hearted people in America have believed till very lately, and many believe still, that slavery is the natural and the happiest condition of the negro. Statesmen and theologians, men of business and

scholars, men who read the New Testament as the record of a Divine revelation and men who reject it, men who differ about a thousand other things, have been agreed about this. They were horrified at what they called the abuses of the system—the cruel floggings, the brutal licentiousness, the separation of husband and wife, which were common in the slave states — but the system itself seemed a very right thing. Lord Brougham justly called it "a wild and guilty phantasy that man could hold property of man;" but people who have grown up in the presence of this institution have not only taken for granted that it was built on wisdom and justice, but, after considering the question, have deliberately come to this conclusion. It is not very long ago that Englishmen thought the same. We have only just passed the thirty-third anniversary of negro emancipation in the British colonies. There are still some men living who had to fight in the British House of Commons for the freedom of the African race, and

to whose relentless logic and fiery eloquence and undaunted courage, we owe it that our own flag does not still protect this enormous crime. There were English manufacturers (some of them have not long been dead, others may be living still) whose trade it was to make handcuffs and chains for the West Indian market; their business was, no doubt, an unpleasant one, but they were not regarded as we regard men whose trade it is to make tools for burglars or to promote prostitution. English gentlemen whose estates were cultivated by slave labour were received into the best English society; English law protected their property; and their sons, their nephews, and great charitable institutions were very glad to be remembered in their wills. The intellect of this country had to be morally instructed before it learnt how dark and villanous a thing slavery really is; and the intellect must be used about our own personal conduct, or we shall be certain to go wrong.

Every man should use his understanding to discover the true character of his actual course of life. If, when a tradesman finds his way into the Bankruptcy Court, it comes out that for years he has never taken stock, or has taken it carelessly, he is very severely censured, and most justly. Every sensible man of business spends several days every year in learning his financial position, and the result of the trade of the previous twelvemonth. He weighs, he measures all his goods. He allows for the deterioration of stock and for the wear and tear of his premises. He reckons up his bad debts, he forms a rough estimate of the debts likely to prove bad. He works night and day. He is restlessly anxious to see how the balance-sheet will show. He uses his understanding to learn whether his business is working *profitably*. Would it not be possible, is it not necessary, to have an examination equally rigorous into the *moral* character of all his transactions? If he is an honest man—above all, if he is a Christian

man—he will think *that* by far the most important thing.

But is there any necessity for such a serious and elaborate inquiry? There is. If a tradesman does not get out an accurate balance-sheet every year, he may be going wrong financially without knowing it: his trade expenses may be eating up all his profits; he may be paying too heavy a rent; spending too much on his premises; employing too many hands; people he trusts may be robbing him; he may seem to have a flourishing business, and yet may be getting into a worse condition every Christmas. I believe that many men, from never investigating the moral character of what they are doing, get wrong morally, without knowing it. They are no worse than their neighbours. They accept, as they think, the common standard of morality, and they suppose that this is quite enough. That is just how men might have argued who were accustomed to buy and sell women and children, and to keep

bloodhounds to hunt down fugitives, and to have their slaves flogged and sometimes shot by reckless overseers. The real question is, whether what a man is doing is right in itself, not whether he is as good as other people.

Take, for instance, the arrangements a draper makes with the young men in his employment. He may follow the custom of his trade, and yet be doing them great injury. It is the "custom" in many houses, doing a particular kind of business, to make arrangements with the people they employ, which are an almost irresistible temptation to trickery, misrepresentation, and dishonesty of every kind. To dispose of the goods of last season, of stock which has been slightly injured, or has been bought cheap from an inferior manufacturer,—it is very common to stimulate the young men who have to sell by giving them a premium on the amount they contrive to "push off." The master does not tell them to lie about the goods; perhaps he is very

particular in telling them to avoid lying; but he may be very sure that some of them will sail very near the wind, and that some will get reckless of truth altogether. He may say, "that is their concern, not mine,"—but it is his concern as well as theirs. He pushes them into the water where the current is running strong, and where only good swimmers can struggle against it, and then tells them not to get drowned.

Again, there are many ways of raising money —winked at while a man is successful—which are not only unsound in themselves, but are severely condemned if a man happens to fail; and there are some of them which are separated by very thin and almost invisible lines from acts which are positively criminal, and bring men under the lash of the law. A man is tempted, when things are going bad with him, to do something which he knows to be illegal, but he thinks he can put everything right before there is any chance

of being discovered; and he cannot see that there is any great difference, morally, between this particular act and what is done constantly by very respectable people. Now, the true method of looking at the case is to ask if both are not wrong. One line may seem hardly more crooked than another, but perhaps neither line is straight. In common stock-taking, a tradesman is anxious, not to know whether he is only a little worse than his neighbours, but whether the balance is clearly on the right side: in his moral stock-taking he should make a similar inquiry. It is very easy for men to go step by step out of the straight path, and to think that they are not wandering at all; but if they would only look at their life as a whole, they would discover that, while they think they have been keeping tolerably near to their neighbours, only going a little farther to the right or the left now and then, they have gone a very long distance astray.

It is also very necessary for a man to use his understanding *to determine what it is morally right for him to attempt.* In how many failures, which bring ruin upon scores of innocent people, it turns out that the bankrupt knew little or nothing of the business he was conducting. He meant nothing wrong, but got involved in hopeless difficulties through sheer incompetency. This does not absolve him from moral blame. If any one ventured to drive a train who understood hardly anything of the construction and working of a locomotive, and there came an accident in which life was lost, the most merciful jury in the kingdom would convict him of manslaughter. He had no right to imperil human life by his ignorance and presumption ;—nor has any one the right to imperil the money of other people by venturing to engage in a trade which he does not understand. If a man enters upon a new business, he ought to have enough capital to cover all the losses he is certain to incur while he is

learning how to conduct it. He is sure to make mistakes; he will trust people he ought not to trust; he will buy at a disadvantage, he will sell at a disadvantage; his working expenses will be unnecessarily heavy; he will blunder in a thousand ways. If he has sufficient money of his own to meet the inevitable losses which will result from his want of special knowledge, he may have a right to run the risk; but he has no right to risk the property of other people, and if he half ruins them and ruins himself altogether, he must not be surprised if instead of pitying him they are very indignant.

The same principle plainly holds with regard to taking situations with the duties of which men are unfamiliar. A master is generally able to find out at once whether the people he is employing are up to their work; but there are cases in which this is not easy; even if the inefficiency is soon discovered, there is loss and inconvenience, and there is reason

for anger and blame. Servants get their situations and their salaries under false pretences if they cannot serve their employer well. They cheat him by giving him a worse article than he paid for.

There is one direction in which these suggestions have received during the last three or four years most melancholy confirmation. Many people appear to have been perfectly intoxicated by the success of certain Joint-Stock Companies, founded on the principle of limited liability. I am very far from saying anything against the principle on which these Companies are established; it seems to me thoroughly sound, and it must give profitable employment to a considerable amount of the capital of the country which has been invested till now in a very unproductive manner.

The whole nation will be the richer if the system is worked fairly and honestly; but what do country clergymen, widows, and spinsters, know of the real character of some of the schemes in

which they take shares? It may be perfectly safe, perhaps, for men who live among merchants, railway people, and stock-brokers, and who find the *Economist* newspaper light and pleasant reading, to invest in Welsh coal mines and Devonshire slate quarries, in ironworks up in Durham, in London land schemes which are to pay twenty-five per cent., and in Companies for running steamboats on the Danube; but what right have most of us to touch things of this kind? We know no more about these matters than we know about the political condition of the moon; for us to have to do with them is mere gambling, and nothing else. We might just as well stake our money at *rouge-et-noir* in a saloon at Baden Baden, or bet on a game of billiards in a London gambling-house.

It is also very plain that some people who live a quiet life — safe, respectable people — have been running most unjustifiable risks, by the extent of the responsibilities they have incurred in connection

with Companies which they had good reason to believe perfectly sound. They are responsible only up to a definite amount; but how far beyond their actual resources does that amount stand? It will not do to reckon that when the worst happens, half at least of their favourite Companies will stand, and that by realizing their shares in these they can meet all possible pressure. Storms blow sometimes in which the best ships seem in danger of sinking; the best investments are almost valueless till confidence is restored. The railway panic twenty years ago failed to teach men wisdom; and many Christian people have to learn that they ought to use their *understanding* — not merely to learn where money can be made most rapidly, but to learn whether they are honest in assuming the responsibilities of investment.

The understanding should be used to *keep us out of the reach of strong temptation.* Our first and supreme concern should be — to keep God's law.

This is the work to which every Christian man has consecrated his life. Whatever else he may be successful in, if he fail in this, he knows that his strength and his very life are wasted.

That in certain positions grave moral dangers are inevitable, is plain to every man who will use common sense; and however earnestly we may pray to God to keep us right, we are guilty of presumption if we voluntarily expose ourselves to perils which we know it will be very hard to escape.

The prayer, "Lead us not into temptation," comes first; then follows, "Deliver us from evil." Angels may hold us up if we slip when we are walking carefully in the right path, but if we cast ourselves needlessly from the pinnacle of the temple, we cannot rely on the Divine protection. To those of my readers whose trade or profession is already fixed for life, I have only to say, that if in itself it is an honest one, you have no choice but to continue in it; but when you have to determine

your children's occupation for them, remember that you have to keep them right, not by your prayers merely, but by the use of your "understanding." You ought to know what their moral weaknesses are; on what side they are most open to temptation; and you are bound to do what you can to shelter them. You are careful enough to warn them against choosing a business for which they have not the necessary physical strength, or which is likely to aggravate some physical disease: there ought surely to be equal anxiety to persuade them to avoid occupations which are likely to prove their moral and religious ruin. For yourselves, too, there may be left the power of choice between circumstances which are perilous and circumstances which are favourable to integrity and devoutness. I am confounded when I see the anxiety of some religious people to creep or to climb into society which is utterly irreligious, and to surround their children with associations which are almost certain to destroy

all Christian earnestness, and to plunge them into frivolity and folly.

Nor can I understand how it is that, under the natural influence of a love for the country, and by the aid of our modern facilities for travelling, persons whose desire to do God's law is real and honest, choose to live miles away from any church where they can heartily worship God. "Our Sundays," they say, "are very unsatisfactory; we cannot get to worship more than once a day; if the weather is unfavourable, we are obliged to remain at home altogether; when we do go, it is so different from what we have been used to, that we are thoroughly dissatisfied; and as for the children, we are very anxious about them." If these good people are absolutely obliged to live where they do, they are to be pitied; but if not, their conduct is unintelligible. If the water in their house were bad, they would leave it directly, spite of the pleasant garden and the attractions of a country life; if it were

impossible for them to get the children educated there, they would leave it; if it seemed to disagree with the health of one member of the family, they would leave it; and yet they voluntarily remain where, by their own confession, their religious life is in danger of stagnating through their "unsatisfactory Sundays," and where their children are in danger of growing up without any religion at all. It is no use for them to hope that by special and extraordinary spiritual help, God will compensate for the want of the common aids to holy living. If they go out into the desert of their own will, they must not expect to be fed with manna from heaven. These people have great need to offer the prayer: "Give me *understanding*, that I may keep Thy law."

Finally, there are circumstances in the lives of many, perhaps of most of us, which test with the utmost severity our loyalty to God and righteousness: — in these the understanding must be used

vigorously if we are to stand firm. When we see the sky darkening with moral tempests, our first duty is to resolve, at all hazards, to keep God's Law, and to endure the heaviest suffering rather than commit the lightest sin. The heart must be braced up to meet the danger. We must determine that nothing shall ever be done by us under any stress of temptation that would make us blush if it were printed in the newspaper next morning, or that would bring a cloud upon the brow of the recording angel as he wrote it down in the book of God. We must determine that if in any moment of weakness we are betrayed into sin, we will never sin again to cover the first offence, whatever shame and loss detection may bring upon us. If, when Peter had denied Christ once, he had immediately recovered himself; if he had confronted even the mockery and contempt of the men in the High Priest's house, who would have laughed at him for his cowardice and scorned him for his lying; he

would surely have seen a Divine benignity in the face of Christ when the Lord "looked" upon him, and the one act of denial, though it would not have passed unreproved, would have been almost forgotten in the Master's approbation of the prompt and courageous repentance. The same Christ is with us now—watching us with infinite love, watching us not to see whether we fall, but to help us to stand erect. If at this moment any Christian man who reads these pages is under strong temptations, let me remind him that the greatest of earthly calamities cannot throw the faintest shadow upon the immortal brightness of his future destiny, that only sin can cast a cloud beyond the grave; that all that is dearest to him even now is beyond the reach of the trouble he dreads; the storm may waste and destroy the harvest of years of honest and laborious industry, may leave him with his home in ruins and surrounded with utter desolation,—but the eternal stars are beyond its reach; they are

shining when its rage is most furious, and when it is spent they will be shining still. The *stars* belong to the man whose supreme desire is to serve God.

But it is not enough, in such circumstances, to determine we will do right; we must take pains to *understand* exactly what the right is. It is my habit to read the reports of bankruptcy cases and of the winding-up of public companies; and the inner pages of a daily paper seem to me much better reading generally than the articles in large type. The more I read, the more plain it seems to me that people go wrong almost as much from want of sense as from want of honesty; it is very often hard to say whether the men who have done the very worst things have been more deficient in integrity or in understanding. They were short of money; and they raised it on terms which would soon have beggared a duke. They were in difficulties; and they relied on the help and advice of men whose cleverness had ruined themselves, and

who were known to be swindlers. They found it hard to make their own business pay, which they knew something about; and they went into schemes for working mines in South America, or speculated in cotton or opium. They had a heavy balance on the wrong side one Christmas, and they went on a little more recklessly for twelve months, hoping that by some miracle it would get right; but they thought when the next Christmas came it would be better to have no balance-sheet at all. What have they done with their *understanding* all this time? How was it possible that they could think, if they thought at all, that it was either honest or expedient to follow a course like this?

Men need to have their brain cool, if they are to escape without stain when the evil days come. They may fall over the precipice through keeping their eyes shut, whether they mean to commit suicide or not. Strange and terrible is the blind-

ness which seems to be inflicted on some at the very time they most need the clearest vision. It may be that their hearts have gone astray first, and they are given over to strong delusion that they may believe a lie.

We know not in what form or at what time the fiery trial may come to us in this world, to try our work, of what sort it is. It comes to some men early, and if they fail, there is often nothing for them but a life of obscure misery and shame; it comes to others when grey hairs are beginning to show on their heads, and, after years of honour and blameless integrity, they have a miserable end. Thank God that every day's well-doing makes us stronger for the struggle, as the silent peaceful days of summer during which the oak is stretching its knotted roots deeper and deeper into the soil, prepares it to meet the fury of wintry storms.

Is there any nobler use of the intellect of man than this, to serve the conscience and the heart

with faithful loyalty, to master the moral laws by which life should be ruled, and the motives which may assist the vacillating will in keeping them? Is not a pure and devout life one of the fairest and most beautiful things which the intellect can assist in creating? This endures when everything besides vanishes and passes away; this secures a true immortality.

There is something sad in considering how much thought there is in the world about inferior things, and how very little about this. Look round a great library; the men whose names we see there gave their days and nights through many years to thinking out what is printed in their books, and it is certain that half of them could have seldom or never thought at all about the morality of their own lives. Artists, fired with passionate enthusiasm for their lofty calling, spent their health and strength in covering their canvas with noble forms and beautiful colouring, but left their own character

shapeless and repulsive. In the souls of famous musicians there has been harsh discord; and the imagination of famous poets has shed no splendour on their personal history.

Among common men, what restless, incessant thought there is about how they may extend their trade and increase their profits, come to live in a larger house and keep a better table, and how little thought about the eternal law of righteousness and their obligation to keep and honour it. Do Christian men believe that He who gave them their intellect meant them to think incessantly of the price of iron, the rate of wages, the condition of the money market, the furniture of their houses, the fruit in their gardens—never, or only sluggishly, about His own awful majesty, His glorious perfections, His Idea of what human life ought to be? Do they think that Christ will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant," merely because having been born poor, they have got money in the

savings' bank, or, having begun life as journeymen, have struggled up until they have become their own masters? Do they think that wealth, like charity, covers a multitude of sins, that they may do many questionable things if they can escape being found out, and that God is more anxious that they should die rich, than that they should live an honest and devout life? Do they think that "the man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel," is sure to sit in a good place in the kingdom of heaven, and that if there come "a poor man in vile raiment," he will be thrust into a corner? The divine judgment will not proceed on such principles as these. When driven to the very verge of sin by fear of poverty or by a feverish thirst for wealth, we should remember that He who is enthroned in the very centre of all the splendours of the city of God was once a poor man, and had not where to lay His head; that His elect and most illustrious servants who sit as princes near their

King were almost as poor as Himself; that suffering and destitution and shame in this world, so far from diminishing our future glory, will make it shine the brighter, if only they are borne with devout patience and courageous faith; that sin is the only enduring evil, and holiness the only eternal good.

II.

THE KINDLY TREATMENT OF OTHER MEN'S IMPERFECTIONS.

THE world is not altogether what we should like it to be, and the life of man is a constant struggle to remedy and overcome its imperfections. The wind is almost always on our beam, and we have to tack and shift our sails incessantly, to make any headway. In our conflict with material difficulties, we have learnt how to achieve great results by very imperfect instruments. The farmer asks science to supply the deficiencies of the soil. The sailor makes careful allowances for the variations of the needle. The artist in the precious

metals, when he discovers that pure gold is too soft for his work, does not throw it aside, but hardens it with alloy.

To accept men for what they are, and to make the best of them, is not so easy. We get impatient and irritable when their tempers, their prejudices, their follies disturb our plans, and give us what we think unnecessary trouble.

We should remember, however, that sin may remain in the most devout and saintly souls. We acknowledge this in church, but in practical life are apt to forget it. Human nature is so complex a thing, that as in the worst men there is generally left some trace of goodness, so in the best there is generally left some stain of evil. To our surprise and joy we now and then "gather grapes of thorns;" and now and then our hands are scratched and torn when we are expecting to pluck the ripe clusters of the vine. Both charity and justice require us to recognize the necessary limits

and exceptions to the general truth, that "a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit."

It does not follow that because a man has some grave faults therefore he has not great virtues. Even in the most highly cultivated countries there are tracts of land which have never been brought under the plough; it is just so with the characters of some men—perhaps of most men; there are patches of waste ground lying here and there utterly useless—offensive to the eye, and covered not with wholesome corn, but with briars and nettles, and weeds of poisonous quality. And there may be real and most resolute righteousness in men who are most ungracious in their manner and speech; just as there is sometimes sturdy vigour in a tree which is so crooked and perverse in its growth, as to be quite destitute of grace and nobleness; an unhappy twist which it received when young, a certain hardness in the soil, or constant exposure to the stress

of an unkindly wind, has fatally injured the beauty of its form, though it has fought a brave and successful fight for life. Then there are people whose moral character is neither unlovely nor seriously defective, but whose innocent "infirmities" are most vexatious and annoying.

We ourselves are in all probability very much like the rest of mankind. When we have learned what our own imperfections are, there is no great difficulty in knowing how to treat them; but how are we to treat the imperfections—moral and intellectual—of our wives and husbands, brothers and sisters, parents and children; of our neighbours, of the men with whom we act on the committees of hospitals, of clerks and workmen, of the ministers of religion, of the people with whom we worship? The question is not altogether an easy one, and the answer must, of course, be varied and modified by the very various relations in which we stand to them by their age,

rank, and official position. But even in the case of our equals it is not always clear what we should do. There is sometimes a conflict of duties. If it is a duty to be patient with the dull and the stupid, it is often necessary, if public work is to be done, and if the men themselves are to be saved from absurdity and mischief, to give them sharp words and lay upon them a heavy hand. Gentleness and forbearance must sometimes give place to firmness, and to the authority which rightfully belongs to a clear brain and a resolute will. If it is a duty to be merciful to the sins of men, and to forgive them "as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us," it is also a duty to be just, and to call good and evil by their right names. We can be under no obligation to form a false judgment of the character and conduct even of those we love best; the utmost that reverence for age, and for the prerogatives which belong to those who have natural claims on our affectionate loyalty, can require is, that we

should form no judgment at all. If people about us are doing wrong, it cannot be our duty to think that they are doing right. If they are covetous, cowardly, and untruthful, we cannot be required to think them liberal, courageous, and honest. We must think of them as they are; and if we speak at all, we must speak of them as we think.

There is a degenerate charity which corrupts the integrity of conscience and destroys all her vigour. To excuse, to palliate, to explain away the offences of other men, is often the first step towards thinking lightly of our own: it is a kind of atonement for tolerating imperfections in ourselves; we shrink from condemning the sins of others, because we know that we judge our own sins too leniently. And to treat wrong-doing lightly is to spare an individual at the cost of impairing the moral spirit of a whole community. Civil and criminal laws derive their chief force, not from the physical power of the legislature or the severity of the threatened

penalties, but from the strong and universal consent of the people: when the mind of the nation changes, laws become obsolete and ineffective without being formally repealed; and moral obligations are practically suppressed or sustained by the common opinion and feeling of society. A hearty hatred and stern condemnation of evil is the best earthly ally of conscience; a general tolerance of it is her worst and most insidious foe. To keep the moral tone of society healthy and vigorous, there must be the expression, in words and deeds, of an intense disgust and contempt for selfishness, meanness, and falsehood; purity must be honoured, and impurity followed with certain disgrace.

And yet charity "endureth all things;" we are to "give place unto wrath;" when we "do well and suffer for it," we are to "take it patiently;" we are to "judge not, that we be not judged."

The lines which separate rival duties are not

sharp and straight like the boundaries of American states and territories in the West, which run along a parallel of latitude, and may be drawn on a map with a ruler and compasses ; they are like the boundaries between European kingdoms, which follow the irregular course of a river and the vagrant windings of a brook, stretch along the sky-line of a mountain range, or bend to the shores of a lake. All that can be given for practical guidance is a statement of general principles ; and these must be intelligently applied by the conscience and judgment to cases as they arise.

The imperfections of men which require kindly treatment may be divided into three classes : those which are not sins at all, and are yet very troublesome and often exceedingly hard to bear ; those which lie on the border-line between innocent infirmities and moral faults ; those which are positively sinful, and yet consistent with general

integrity and excellence of character. About men who are altogether bad, I do not propose to say anything in this paper.

Perhaps it is most easy to treat generously the imperfections which involve most guilt, and most difficult to tolerate the imperfections which involve no guilt at all. How hard it is, for instance, to be kindly or even just to men who are intellectually obtuse and dull. The reality and seriousness of the trouble they give it is impossible to deny and difficult to exaggerate. There are men who are always misunderstanding what they have to do, or the way in which they have to do it. They are very slow in comprehending what we say to them, and when, as the result of tedious and repeated explanations, they have caught a glimpse of our meaning, they seem quite unable to retain it. They weary and exhaust the patience of the most gentle and enduring of their friends, by relapsing into mistakes which have been a hundred times corrected. They are

often good-hearted and devout, but so deficient in clearness and quickness of vision, that they irritate more active-minded people almost beyond endurance.

The only true wisdom is to accept the inevitable; and, if we wish to "fulfil the law of Christ," we shall bear it as cheerfully as we can. No keen shafts of angry contempt will make these unfortunate men a whit more rational. You cannot sting them into cleverness. You may annoy them by showing your impatience, and making them feel it, but you cannot change them. You should remember that your quickness is as great a trouble to them as their slowness to you. If you and they have to live and work together, the sooner you accept them for what they are, the better it will be for both parties. It may be almost unendurable to you, who commonly travel express, to be doomed for fifty miles to the misery of a "parliamentary;" but when this is your fate, it is of no use stamping your feet

and knitting your brows and getting out of temper. You must take weak men as you find them, and place your strength at the service of their weakness. If they are blind, it is for you to see for them, and to keep them out of harm's way; if they are lame, it is for you to let them lean on your arm and to moderate your own speed to theirs.

There is nothing else to be done; no fuming and fretting will make any difference; by gentleness and patience you will serve yourself best as well as them. Sometimes, too, these heavy dull-eyed people have real solid sense to which our conceit blinds us. The leaden casket sometimes contains the jewel. By self-restraint and forbearance, we can sometimes get substantial service from men whom in our haste we thought hopelessly stupid.

There is another class of persons who severely try the temper, but who have the strongest claims to kindliness—persons who are very far

from being deficient in intellectual force, but who have picked up odd crotchets, or have caught a positive craze about something that seems important to no mortal on earth except themselves. The most beautiful marble sometimes has a "fault" in it; and the most vigorous minds are sometimes the victims, on a solitary point, of grotesque and absurd delusions. We show a great want of discernment if we do not recognize the general soundness of their judgment, and their right to consideration and respect, spite of their peculiarities; and we show an inordinate self-confidence if we are always endeavouring to put them right. A little humouring of their folly when we come across it, and habitual vigilance to keep as far out of its way as possible, will make our life with these people run smoothly. If you are obliged to drive a horse which always shies when passing a particular gate, you will try, if you can, not to pass it; or if

you have no choice, you will try to "occupy his mind" with something else when it is in sight. If men always treated their friends as wisely and considerately as they treat their horses, the world would be saved very much needless ill-temper and irritation.

Forbearance still gentler is due to those whose consciences are morbidly sensitive, or who have come under the tyranny of severe conceptions of the divine law and of the Christian life, which to a man of robust and magnanimous faith are inexplicable. No doubt there are limits beyond which St. Paul's principle, that "we who are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves," should not be pressed. But we violate the obligations of Christian charity if we treat the "weak" contemptuously. We may try to win them away from their intense self-consciousness by the healthy contagion of a more vigorous life. We may try to lead them away

from their formalism to profounder and larger views of the true idea of Christian perfection. We may try to reason them out of their ignoble and ungenerous thoughts of God. But if we know anything of the compassion of Christ, we shall never taunt them or fling out easy sarcasms at their scrupulosity and narrowness. There are people whose religious conceit and hardness of heart may be most legitimately and effectively attacked by weapons like these; they deserve no respect, and should have none; they need to be taught that their pretensions do not impose upon us. But God forbid that sincere and humble men, in whom self-distrust and self-reproach have darkened all joy and ruined all peace, should be treated thus contemptuously. Their needless fears and scruples may be a cause of annoyance to us, as well as of misery to themselves; but their weakness appeals to our pity, and we must bear with it, and do what we can to strengthen, not to crush it.

The forms of imperfection which have been already noticed are morally blameless; there are others which lie on the border land between innocent weakness and positive guilt. These, for the most part, we are not likely to treat harshly.

When, for instance, protracted sickness brings weariness and discontent and repining, and the kindest heart seems sometimes embittered, and nothing can give pleasure or allay discontent, most of us, it is to be hoped, find it easy to be gentle and patient. No doubt there may be sin in this inability to endure the monotonous days and nights of the sick-room with quiet cheerfulness; but the suffering and weakness charm our severer thoughts away. Though strict moralists might, perhaps, impeach the validity of our excuses, we say — and it is right for us to say it — that our friend is not himself; that in his physical prostration he is not responsible

for his restlessness and irritability; that when health and strength come back all will be well again.

The same kindliness and forbearance are sometimes due to men who ought perhaps to be in the sick-room, or, better still, far away from home, among the mountains or on the sea; but who are obliged to remain in their counting-house or their "works," maintaining a desperate struggle against serious disasters. Night after night they come home exhausted with anxiety; day after day the fever is kindling on their brain, and only the most resolute self-control keeps it down; they are haunted with incessant fears; for weeks they never know what it is to have a single hour's healthy rest. How can they help being sometimes sharp and reckless in their words? What leisure and freedom of soul have they for the courtesies and charities of life? Even in such circumstances, some men seem to remain perfect masters of

themselves. They are not altogether absorbed in their cares. They can still be courteous, considerate, and even genial. But it is almost too much to expect that the preternatural peace, "which the world cannot give and cannot take away," though it may dwell in the heart, will always be revealed in the words and actions of excited and harassed men. They deserve at least as much forbearance as though they were passing through a painful and perilous illness. They resent as unjust, spite of themselves, the sensitiveness which people who know nothing of their troubles manifest at their occasional petulance; but that petulance is not only soothed, it is condemned by their own consciences, when it is patiently borne with and magnanimously overlooked.

The transition is easy to the infirmities which come from old age. Nothing is sadder than to see a vigorous mind gradually sinking into feebleness

and a noble nature yielding to selfishness, suspicion, and little meannesses, under the pressure of accumulating years. Remember what the old man was in the ardour of his youth and the energy of his middle life; forget what he seems to be now. Treat him reverently, as you would the ruins of a cathedral. Here and there, though the walls are shattered and the arches broken, you may see the fragments of massive columns; and even the exquisite tracery, where it has been sheltered from wind and rain, has not altogether disappeared. You believe that though the temple is destroyed, Christ will "raise it again" in more than its former stateliness and splendour. "Walk by faith" and by memory, "not by sight." Believe that the abounding and fruitful life you saw last summer and autumn will reappear when the spring returns, and in the "winter" of his "discontent" let the old man be still honoured and loved.

Or if sorrow and misfortune have strangely altered those who were charming and bright in other years, the imperfections which you cannot help recognizing should not repel your kindliness or provoke impatience. Delicacy and refinement of character are hard to keep in sordid circumstances. Poverty, if it continues long, will often embitter the sweetest temper and make the most generous cynical. The bereaved and the lonely are in danger of having all their thoughts concentrated in their own grief and desolation, and of making unreasonable and exorbitant claims on the time and sympathy of those they love. They become moody in their solitude. They are quick to catch the faintest signs of neglect. They morbidly exaggerate and often interpret most unjustly words spoken inconsiderately, but with no evil intent. We must not expect all who suffer to become saints ; we must think of the weakness of human nature ; we must not be surprised that imperfections

of character are revealed by fiery trial, of which nothing was known or suspected before; and we must not forget how much that is good and lovable is still left. The infirmities of the unfortunate may pass the line which separates innocent weaknesses from a temper and spirit which deserve rebuke and condemnation; but we must not draw the line too rigidly—with *them* it is safest to err on the side of charity.

Then, again, there are real faults which lie so near kindred excellencies that a generous man will sometimes almost forget that they are faults at all. "Noble natures," as Lord Lytton says, "are liable to be led astray by their favourite virtues; for it is the proverbial tendency of a virtue to fuse itself into its neighbouring vice." Self-will is often only the exaggeration of moral and intellectual vigour; often, too, there are traces of this vice in a man's bearing and modes of speech long after the vice itself has been com-

pletely subdued. Recklessness is the exaggeration of ardour and courage. Coldness often comes from humility and self-distrust. Egotism and vanity are often the mere spray thrown up by frankness, candour, and a child-like confidence in the goodness of heart of all mankind.

No doubt it would be better if we could have the good without the evil which seems to be almost inseparable from it; but when the evil which is in a man is really the exaggeration of his special type of goodness, it is neither rational, nor just, nor charitable to censure him without reserve and qualification. There are faults of which some men have not virtue enough to be capable.

The treatment of those graver offences, which sometimes mar the character of really good people, involves few ethical difficulties; if our

hearts are right we shall not seriously fail. That even good men will often be betrayed into sin, is implied in all our prayers and in all our dogmatic teaching. If we are not prepared to acknowledge that there may be a deep and fervent love of God and yet frequent transgression of His law, we should cease to confess sin in the public devotions of the Church, and should invoke God's pardon only for those who are altogether irreligious. There are precepts scattered throughout the New Testament which would have had no place there, if as soon as men accepted the authority of Christ they were sure to keep all His commandments. Not merely to those who have no Christian life, but to those who have received "power to become the sons of God," and who, in the highest meaning of the words, are "our brethren in Christ," we have to show long-suffering and forbearance. We are to forgive them their tres-

passes; but where there is no sin, forgiveness is impossible.

The estrangement which separates Christian men from each other for years, because one of them has been guilty of wrong towards the other, or, as frequently happens, because there has been mutual injury, and both have been greatly at fault, is altogether indefensible: it cannot even be palliated or excused. The refusal to pardon is almost as grave a sin as the original offence; sometimes it is a still darker and more ominous sign of the absence of the spirit of Christ. Nor is the mere cessation of positive enmity an adequate fulfilment of Christian law. What magnanimity there is in God's forgiveness! He retains no trace of anger. He *forgets* our sin and casts it behind His back. It vanishes like a cloud from the summer sky, and leaves the brightness of heaven without a shadow or a stain. He trusts us again with all His former confidence. He

never upbraids. And we, in the very matter of mutual forgiveness, are charged to "be followers of God."

We have not forgiven a man merely because our ill-feeling towards him has died out. What has been done by the mere lapse of time and by the fading away from the imagination of a vivid apprehension of the wrong we suffered, is not to be set to the credit of our Christian charity. We trust God to forgive us when the offence is still fresh, to pardon at night the sin which has been committed since the morning; and His prompt and eager mercy is to be a law to us.

Some men, oddly enough, think that they show a very generous spirit when they are willing to "receive explanations" of an injury which has provoked their anger. But this is to be barely just. If what seemed a wrong can be explained, it requires no forgiveness. What would be our condition if God's mercy went no further than

this —"a willingness to receive explanations?" It is only where a grave offence has been really committed, an offence which cannot be shown to have been only apparent or accidental, that there is any occasion for pardon.

Is it necessary to protest against the wickedness of making the very form of Christian forgiveness the vehicle of revenge? There is an ostentatious display of magnanimity, a parade of generosity, a loud profession of freedom from all angry and hostile feelings, which is as alien as possible from the spirit with which we ought to show mercy, even to those who have incurred serious blame and inflicted upon us serious injury. The ceremonial of pardon is sometimes nothing more than the last and most cruel punishment for the wrong. It is a re-proclamation of the offence with all the circumstances which aggravated it. It is only another way of pronouncing sentence on the crime. It is an assertion of the transcendent

moral superiority of the injured person, and an invitation to the wrong-doer to confess, not his own faults merely, but the immaculate and shining virtues of the saint who pardons it. Surely, when "we forgive men that trespass against us," we should remember our own trespasses, which need forgiveness both from man and God; it is not the time for the insulting assertion of our superior goodness. There are some men whose revenge is less bitter and more tolerable than their pardon.

To reach the perfection of that spirit of mercy which the example and precepts of Christ alike inculcate, may seem quite beyond our mortal strength, and we may sometimes be ready to say that this is an attainment which is possible only to those who have escaped from the necessary infirmities of our present condition, and been transformed into the image of God by the open

vision of His glory. But we should remember that we shall have no opportunity for the forgiveness of injuries in heaven; and it may be an additional motive to the cultivation of this form of Christian charity, that the mercy which we sometimes speak of as the brightest of the Divine perfections can never be manifested by us at all, if we do not manifest it here. Many other elements of holiness are destined to immortal development and activity; if they are dwarfed and imperfect in this life, they will have eternity in which to unfold their strength and beauty. But in a world where there will be no sin, mutual forbearance and forgiveness can have no place. Charity "abideth" for ever; but this particular fruit of the noblest of Christian graces can blossom and ripen only amidst the fitful sunshine and the clouds and storms of this inferior state. There are many of the loftiest virtues of the Christian character—and this is one of them—

which in some of their fairest and noblest forms must be revealed in the brief and troubled years of our earthly life, or they will be for ever beyond our reach.

III.

TALEBEARING.

AGAINST the grosser sins of the tongue it is hardly necessary to warn Christian people. They are not likely to be guilty either of blasphemy or of cruel and malignant lying. Abstinence from the worst and most aggravated sins of speech is for most men a very easy virtue, and can give no claim to appropriate the very remarkable saying of St. James, that "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." But some of the lighter offences of the tongue, as they are the most common, are also, perhaps, the most annoying and mischievous in their consequences.

Talebearing is a sin which very many people are committing constantly: their consciences never condemn them for it; they never ask God to forgive it; they take no trouble to resist the temptations to it; and even when they discover the pain, the misunderstanding, the strife, it sometimes produces, they are "sorry it should have so happened," they "meant no harm," but they are very inadequately impressed with their responsibility and guilt.

There are indeed some kinds of talebearing about the wickedness of which there can be no misapprehension. Ezekiel speaks of "men that carry tales to shed blood." Without investigating the truth of reports which reach them, without carefully considering whether what has been said or done admits of any explanation which would remove the apparent guilt, there are some persons who deliberately blast the characters of their acquaintances, poison the love and confidence of old friends, or add

fuel to the hatred of men who are enemies already. Such talebearing as this is the proof of horrible malice; every upright and generous man will loathe and execrate it.

But the talebearer may be innocent of bad intention, and yet do incalculable mischief. The man who fires at random may inflict a mortal wound as well as the man who takes a deliberate aim. The dagger may not be poisoned, and yet it may kill. The Hebrew word in Prov. xxvi. 20, which has been well translated a "talebearer," meant originally nothing more than a chatterer, a garrulous person, one that talks fast. We all know people of that kind, people that gossip incessantly, whose tongue never wearies, whose talk for one single day would fill the columns of the *Times* with domestic accidents, petty offences, the sayings of their friends, the habits and customs of all their neighbours. They know, or they guess, who was invited to dinner next door last week, and why it was that two or

three who were invited did not come: they can tell you the reason why one young lady has gone from home, and why another looks pale and ill: they know how it is that one of their acquaintances has moved into a smaller house, and the exact amount of the legacy which has enabled another to set up a brougham instead of a phaeton: they know the sins and shortcomings of the cook and the housemaid in every family they visit, and how it is some of their dear friends change their servants so often: they can tell you, or think they can, all about the fortunate investments of one gentleman, and the business losses of another: they create and they explain innumerable mysteries: they have found out how it happened that two fast friends met each other in the street without speaking: and why it was that somebody passed the plate at the last collection. They have no bad designs. They mean to wrong no man's character, to hurt no man's feelings. But they have an insatiable curiosity, and a tongue

which nothing can restrain. They forget the Apostolic precept, "Study to be quiet, and to do your own business." Without meaning it, they betray every man's privacy; they tell every man's secrets, and generally tell them incorrectly; they stir up strife, and their "words are wounds." (Prov. xviii. 8.)

What are the causes of this unhappy and most mischievous habit?

It is often, perhaps generally, the result of intellectual poverty. I infer that the man who is always talking to me about the small affairs of his friends and acquaintances, has nothing better to talk about. He plainly confesses his destitute condition. If there were in him any shrewdness, any humour, any wisdom, any knowledge of a worthy kind, he would not insult me by attempting to entertain me with such miserable fare. No doubt he brings out his best. It is a pity that he does not know

that his silence would be more instructive and more amusing than his speech.

It is very commonly, too, the result of the absence of intelligent interest in great affairs, and of devotion to noble and elevated pursuits. The man who has a love for literature and the arts, or who watches with solicitude the fortunes of nations, or who is keenly interested in the triumph of great principles in politics or religion, or who is zealously engaged in endeavours to diminish the sufferings of mankind, and to recover from their sin those who have forgotten God, will seldom be a talebearer himself, or waste time in listening to one.

Again, this habit is generally the sign of a very weak judgment. There are many persons who show the most amazing incapacity of appreciating the impression their words are sure to produce. They will tell you in the most innocent way tales about people you know, which, if they cannot be contradicted or modified by explanatory circumstances, must

destroy all confidence in their commercial stability, their personal honour, or their religious sincerity. They have no sense of the care they should have taken before believing the report themselves, much less of the gravity of the reasons which alone could justify their repeating it, even if true. And, when the matter is less serious, it is still surprising with what lightness and unconcern they will sow the seeds of distrust, of suspicion, of dislike. They are often so kindly that if they could form any estimate of the practical effect of what they say, they would cut out their tongues rather than be talebearers any more. The mischief they produce is not to be attributed to malice, but to feebleness of judgment; for which, however, they are often to be blamed as well as pitied.

Talebearing with some people is a means of asserting their self-importance. It is curious to watch the indications of their anxiety to show the confidential relations in which they stand to every one who is

supposed to be worth knowing for his wealth, position, or intellectual power. They do not seem to perceive that if they are trusted by the persons of whom they speak so freely, they are proving by their imprudent speech how unworthy they are of confidence. A still more serious and injurious form which this vanity assumes is, when the talebearer, in order to produce an impression of his own consequence, betrays information which has come to him in his professional or official capacity. But to some men the temptations of vanity are so strong as to overcome all considerations of prudence, justice, and honour.

Some people are talebearers through the love of being listened to and producing a sensation. They delight to see the amazement which follows the revelation of their last discovery. They know that nothing which their own brains have produced will interest any mortal under the sun; but they have a craving to be the centre of attentive listeners; and so instead of wit they talk scandal; they can't say

anything very wise, but they can speak about the unexpected misfortunes or the ludicrous follies of their neighbours. Talebearers of this kind are always delighted when they happen to hear anything very piquant; they are restless till they have told it. They know exactly how to throw light and shade into their story, and how to dress every feature of it to the best advantage. They are not satisfied, like some inferior followers of the trade, with gossip of any kind; they have an artistic instinct for what will be effective. They are not quite without sympathy if they happen to see a neighbour overtaken by an accident, but it is a real consolation to them that they can tell how it occurred. If they only reflected for a moment, they would discover to their shame, that very often the saddest circumstances of human life have been to them only fresh material for satisfying the miserable desire to touch the hearts and awaken the curiosity of their friends.

There is reason enough for avoiding the habit of talebearing in what we have seen of its ignoble origin; whoever indulges in it shows himself destitute of sense or of judgment, or of right feeling. But there are other reasons which deserve our consideration.

Talebearing is a waste, and worse than a waste, of the faculty of speech. No one supposes that we ought never to speak except when we have something remarkably wise to say. To tell the truth, most of us find it very wearying to listen to people who always "talk like a book." Conversation may be very harmless and yet not instructive; pleasant, amusing talk is one of the healthiest of recreations. I am very thankful that there are flowers in the world as well as fruit-trees, singing-birds as well as birds that look well on the table, pictures and music as well as cotton goods and hardware. I am very thankful, too, that there are people whose conversation is picturesque and entertaining, as well as people

who can talk science and philosophy. As change of air and sleep are necessary for the body, so some freedom and rest are necessary for the mind. But our recreation is neither harmless nor healthful, when it is derived from invading the privacy of other men's homes, or from tearing to pieces, however justly, other men's reputations. This is a pernicious, not an innocent use of the tongue. And those who are habitually guilty of it, not only employ their own faculty of speech badly, — they hinder their friends from talking to better purpose. When once you discover that a man is a talebearer, you are very little inclined to speak before him with perfect freedom, and shrink from telling the thoughts which lie deepest in your heart, remembering the precept, "Cast not your pearls before swine."

Talebearing appeals to and strengthens a mean and vulgar curiosity, and so does harm to those who listen to it. They become accomplices in the sin; they are almost sure to catch the infection and to

crown every story by another. One talebearer makes many.

It destroys the freedom of life and the unreserve of friendship. It has been said by some one, Always live with your friend as though he might some day become your enemy, and with your enemy as though he might some day become your friend. Friendship is not worth having on such terms; and all the life and joy of kindly intercourse perish in the presence of the talebearer. Open-hearted men like to think aloud, trusting to the good sense of their friends to supply the necessary limitations to all they say. You may repeat their exact words and yet misrepresent them most injuriously; for you cannot repeat the circumstances in which they were uttered, nor the tone of the speaker, nor his look; nor can you explain what he knew would be the impression produced by his language on those who heard it. You must have seen sometimes how the entrance of a talebearer puts an end to all free

talk. Men know that the warm expression of high religious feeling will look like Pharisaical pretentiousness if it is repeated, that their kindly fun will look like sarcasm, that their jesting will look like earnest, that their merriment will look like childish nonsense. It would not be hard to find people who have lost all openness and freedom, through their observation or through their bitter experience of the mischief done by talebearers. It is an intolerable bondage which this wretched habit imposes upon many; they feel obliged never to say anything that might not be printed, just as they said it, in next day's paper, and read by all the world. Talebearing has made them stiff and cold, nervously cautious, and hopelessly reserved.

It is impossible that the talebearer should be always free from the guilt of circulating falsehood. There are very few things of which we can be quite sure; very few of us have ever heard anything about ourselves which was not more or

less inaccurate. The chances are that the man who is under the power of this habit is incapable of receiving a just and accurate impression even of what he sees and hears himself, and in the perpetual repetition of his story he is certain to give it a great variety of shapes. The power of telling a tale just as it happened is almost as rare as the power of sketching a true portrait. Words are perhaps harder to use well than lines and colours. And if you tell the story yourself with tolerable correctness, you can never be sure that it will be told correctly by any one person that hears it from you. Some circumstances will be dropped which will change the whole look of it; something will be unconsciously added that will give it altogether a different colour; the sketch, as it leaves your hand, may be tolerably correct, but it will require a clever artist exactly to reproduce it. You are not responsible, you think, for what other people make of your story: but you are — for it is almost certain,

and you know it—that it will come out of their lips with omissions or misapprehensions which will make it quite untrue. While you said nothing, no harm could be done: as soon as you have told the tale, you have no control over it. You may have been careful to put in all the qualifications and explanations which would prevent any mischief, but it requires very little knowledge of life to be aware that these are likely to disappear after one or two repetitions.

Of all the foolish pretences by which talebearers justify themselves for telling what should never be told, surely this is the most ridiculous, that they spoke "in confidence." If they found it so hard to hold their tongue, what right have they to subject a friend to the inconvenience which they could not bear themselves? If they are guilty of betraying trust, what right have they to expect that their own trust will not be betrayed? They ask their friend "not to tell," but

their example is likely to be more effective than their precept.

There is one curious device by which some people seek to indulge their prevailing vice, and yet to avoid, as they think, telling secrets, which is worth noticing. They give the story, but cancel the names. Sometimes they begin on this plan, but unintentionally a single name slips out, and everything is plain at once ; or they find it so tedious and tiresome to keep up the mystery, that with great protestations of not having meant to name anybody, they tell you who it is. Very often, if no accident of this kind happens, the veil is easily seen through ; and even if you are careful to omit half the story, to throw your hearer off the scent, it sometimes happens that he has heard from some one else what you omit to tell, and then, like the pieces of a broken tally, the two parts curiously fit into each other, and you have made him much wiser than you intended.

Again, it is hardly possible for a talebearer not to get into the habit of talking more about the faults of others than about their excellencies. Most novelists feel that if there is no wickedness in their book, it is almost sure to be dull; and most talebearers find that there is something much more effective in a story about the weaknesses, mistakes, or follies of others than in a story about their wisdom and virtue. You may speak of the good deeds of your friends incessantly, and never earn the name. The very word "talebearer" has come to mean one who tells tales to other people's discredit; and we have not a word in the language which denotes one who habitually speaks of other men's excellencies.

Finally, talebearing is the fruitful cause of misunderstanding, and embitters and perpetuates unkindliness and enmity. "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out; so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth." "The tongue of a busybody,"

says Bishop Hall, "is like the tail of Samson's foxes: carries firebrands, and is enough to set the whole field of the world in a flame." More than half the quarrels in families, more than half the estrangements among friends, are the result of this most common yet most sinful practice. Words spoken carelessly or in haste, reported seriously; words spoken without any ill meaning, interpreted injuriously by a suspicious hearer, and carried to a third party with notes and comments; words spoken in a connection which deprived them of their sting, separated from all that preceded and all that followed them, and told with an air of sympathy to the last man who should have heard of them;—how often these have estranged hearts that loved each other well, and been followed by life-long enmity!

Acts which were harmless, and perhaps praiseworthy, but which are unintelligible to those who are not familiar with all their circumstances,—how often have these been narrated and regretted and

mourned over, until the reputation of a good man has cruelly suffered, and old friends been made to distrust him!

Without malice, apparently without motive, through mere carelessness and love of gossip, tales have been often told which have darkened the sunlight of many a home, cut to the quick many a sensitive soul, destroyed the confidence and affection which had silently grown up through years of kindly intercourse and happy friendship.

That a tale is true is no reason for telling it. Many a man utters words in haste and irritation which he would gladly recall by almost any sacrifice. To repeat them is to be guilty of heartless cruelty. Intentionally to use a merely accidental slip, to rob a man of the love of those who are dear to him, is the act of a fiend; and to do it carelessly deserves severe condemnation.

And now what counsel should be given to those

who are so unfortunate as to have talebearers among their acquaintances?

Never listen to them, if you can help it. "The receiver is as bad as the thief." If you are deaf, they will soon be dumb. When they come to tell you something you "ought to know," tell them that very often the old line is true, that "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." You may indeed sometimes think that it is better the tale should be told to you than to anybody else, and that when once you have heard it, it will not be told again; this may, perhaps, be a reason for tolerating the talebearer, especially if you are quite sure that not the slightest impression will be produced on your own mind to the injury of any one involved in the story. By listening you may, perhaps, prevent further mischief. But even this is a doubtful justification; and you ought not to be satisfied without attempting to make the talebearer sensible of his folly and sin.

Never give him the chance of reporting anything about yourself. Shroud yourself in impenetrable reserve. Make him feel that his habit excludes him from all the pleasures of confidence and intimacy with wise men. Talk to him about the weather and the crops, the news from America and the price of the Funds. Never say anything that may not be safely twisted into any conceivable shape, reported by a hundred foolish tongues, without doing any harm. Never tell him anything that you would not trust him to say over again in any words he might like to use, and with every possible misapprehension of your meaning, on the platform of Exeter Hall, before three thousand people. Be especially afraid of him when he is particularly obsequious, when he praises your business tact, and admires the taste with which you have laid out your garden. Under the warmth of his good opinion, your reserve is likely to relax. Remember the words of Solomon:

"He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets, *therefore* meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips."

See that you create in your own house and among all your friends a spirit of intolerance for the offence, and a moral judgment that shall repel and condemn the offender. Let talebearing never be regarded as a weakness, but as a vice. Let no cleverness palliate it. Make it despised as a meanness, censured as a sin.

There are, indeed, "Tales" which ought to be told and listened to—"Tales" of cheerful patience in suffering, of energy and self-denial in well-doing, of open-handed generosity, of incorruptible integrity. Such "Tales" have elevated the moral aims of many of us, inspired our sinking hearts with courage and constancy, given force and fire to our noblest passions. The Gospel itself is a "Tale;"—and the Apostles "turned the world upside down," not by a moral or religious theory, but by the story of

how the Lord Jesus loved mankind. Yes, the story of His poverty and homelessness, temptation and agony, His miracles of mercy and His words of love, His shame and death, is the spell by which even the hardest and most profligate of men have been softened, and recovered to a holy and blessed life. Tell that story, and little children will feel its charm, and aged men and women, bowed down under the cares and sorrows of a lifetime, will confess its power. Would to God that every Christian tongue, which is now too often used in reporting and discussing the failings of good men and the sins of the ungodly, could learn to tell the tale of Christ's infinite compassion! "Life and death are in the power of the tongue." "By thy words shalt thou be justified, and by thy words shalt thou be condemned."

IV.

UNWHOLESOME WORDS.

THOMAS CARLYLE'S theory that speech is silvern but silence golden, would have perplexed our English Chrysostom. "Though silence," says Jeremy Taylor, "be harmless as a rose's breath to a distant passenger, yet it is rather the state of death than life;" and then taking fire, according to his manner, he exclaims, "By voices and homilies, by questions and answers, by narratives and invectives, by counsel and reproof, by praises and hymns, by prayers and glorifications, we serve God's glory and the necessities of men; and by the tongue, our tables are made to differ from mangers, our cities

from deserts, our churches from herds of beasts and flocks of sheep." Could we bring the fervid and eloquent bishop from his grave again, what a glorious night he and our living philosopher might make of it! And who could tell, for the first three or four hours, which of them was likely to have the best of the controversy? The philosopher, quoting Hooker, might growl that the present age is "full of tongue and weak of brain," and remind the bishop that he himself had admitted that "the perpetual unavoidable necessity of sinning by much talking hath given great advantages to silence, and made it to be esteemed an act of discipline and great religion." But the bishop, though he would confess that he remembered that many saints had dreaded the perils of speech—that "St. Romualdus upon the Syrian mountain severely kept a seven years' silence," and that "Thomas Cantepatrientis tells of a religious person in a monastery at Brabant, that spake not one word in sixteen years," and that

"Ammona lived with three thousand brethren in so great silence as if he were an anchoret," and that "Theona was silent for thirty years together; and Johannes, surnamed Silentiarius, was silent for forty-seven years"—would go on to maintain that this morosity and sullenness "must certainly draw with it, or be itself an infinite omission of duty;" and I am inclined to think that before morning came, he would make the philosopher admit that silence is not always the proof of wisdom, nor eloquent speech of folly; and with a gracious argument *ad hominem*—for the apostle of silence himself is one of the best of talkers — as the darkness began to melt into the dawn, the bishop's ghost would say Farewell.

But though it is possible for men to sin by talking too little as well as by talking too much—as when silence is the result of sheer indolence, or of coldness, and an incapacity to sympathize with the common thoughts and cares and pleasures of

others—it is less necessary to insist on the duty of speaking, than to insist on the duty of speaking wisely and well.

St. Paul, in warning the Christians at Ephesus against certain sins of the tongue, uses a word which, if we may take it in the sense it very commonly bears, affords a most expressive description of many forms of mischievous talk. He charges them not to let any "*corrupt* communication" proceed out of their mouth. Perhaps the image which the word calls up was not distinctly present to his mind; but it might have been, for it is a very just one. The epithet is used to describe vegetables, meat, and fish which are beginning to go bad; and there are some people whose conversation is quite as unwholesome as food which is not quite fresh. Unsound itself, it injures the moral health and vigour of those who listen to it.

There are some words which are positively *poisonous*. St. Paul was not thinking of these. Falsehood

he had already forbidden. Violent speech comes under the general precept, "Be ye angry, and sin not." "Filthiness and foolish talking" he condemns in the next chapter. Words may be neither false, nor fierce, nor foul, and yet may be "corrupt" and unwholesome.

Among the kinds of speech which answer the Apostle's description, flattery is one of the worst. Perhaps this is not very common among Englishmen—certainly not among Englishmen of the lower and middle classes; of the rest I know nothing. Our language seems hardly ductile enough to assume the graceful forms which flattery requires. Its idiom has been fixed by the common people, not by courtiers. Those pleasant phrases which glide so naturally from a Frenchman's tongue, and in which kindly falsehood "loses half its evil by losing all its grossness," refuse to grow on English soil. Our speech has too much blood and heat in

it for us ever to be able to rival our neighbours. And yet we, too, can flatter, though with less refinement and delicacy.

The most fatal kind of flattery is that in which there is truth enough to sweeten the bitter taste of positive falsehood. Praise the scholarship of a dunce who has been thrice "plucked," the munificence of a miser, the eloquence of an orator to whom no mortal will listen except at his own dinner-table, the courage of a coward who turns pale at a thunder-storm and has never crossed the Channel through his fear of being drowned, and you will do no great harm. It is when you dwell upon and heighten the advantages upon which a man plumes himself that you nurse his vanity. It is when you expatiate on his real excellencies and powers that you inflict upon him the worst injury. The perfect charm of generosity is when it thinks of nothing except the misery it relieves, the ignorance it instructs, the vice it reclaims; if you insist upon

making benevolence conscious of itself, by fawningly contrasting the niggardliness of a man's friends and neighbours with his own free-handed bountifulness, you help to impair its simplicity and degrade its nobleness. Talk to a man of real genius as though he were already crowned with amaranth and enthroned among the stars, and you cherish a conceit which may imperil his future triumphs. Talk habitually about the defalcations and the scarcely disguised dishonesties of rival merchants and manufacturers to a man who is proud of his integrity, and you encourage a self-satisfaction which may issue in his moral ruin.

I am very far from thinking that we should look upon noble deeds and great powers with cold indifference. To admire what is admirable is as much a duty as to despise what is worthless. There are children and men who need praise as much as flowers need sunshine. They have no faith in themselves, and only learn what they can do at second-

hand; the confidence and approbation of others give them courage and hope. With some men the fear of failure makes failure certain, and their strength is gone when men do not recognize it. Lord Lytton, in his charming essay on the Efficacy of Praise, tells a story of Mr. Kean, who, when performing in some city of the United States, came to the manager when the play was half over and said, "I can't go on the stage again, sir, if the pit keeps its hands in its pockets. Such an audience would extinguish Ætna." Upon this the manager told the audience that Mr. Kean, not being accustomed to the severe intelligence of American citizens, mistook their silent attention for courteous disappointment, and that if they did not applaud Mr. Kean as he was accustomed to be applauded, they could not see Mr. Kean act as he was accustomed to act. Of course the audience took the hint; and as their fervour rose, so rose the genius of the actor, and their applause contributed to the triumphs it rewarded.

We live more than half our life in the sympathy of others, and their good opinion is a wholesome stimulant to well-doing. It sustains our own best purposes. It may help to keep our ideal of life from sinking. With many a lad, hearty praise of a well-written copy of verses would be far more certain to keep him from careless blunders in his next exercise than the fear of a sound flogging; and many a man who would resent censure for his habitual stinginess will give freely if his occasional liberality is cordially appreciated.

Nearly everything depends upon the intention of the speaker. Honest approbation seldom inflates vanity. It is when we praise a man in order to win his good opinion for ourselves, that we are likely to give him too good an opinion of himself. The selfishness of the motive will somehow corrupt even the most truthful words, and make them as rotten and unwholesome as the falsehoods of an unscrupulous sycophant.

Habitual disparagement of the character, the powers, the acquirements, or the doings of men in general, is not less pernicious than flattery of those whom we desire to please. Cynicism is the temper of our times. We are becoming incapable of enthusiasm. We are always implying that not only "the age of chivalry," but the age of greatness and goodness of every kind is gone. We are not sure that it ever existed. We are nothing if not critical. We carry the wretched spirit of depreciation into private life. It taints our estimate of public men.

There are people who have a preternatural faculty for detecting evil, or the appearance of evil, in every man's character. They have a fatal scent for carrion. Their memory is like a museum I once saw at a medical college, and illustrates all the hideous distortions and monstrous growths and revolting diseases by which humanity can be troubled and afflicted. They think they have a wonderful

knowledge of human nature; I prefer to study it in the beautiful and majestic forms of heroes and gods. It is a blunder to mistake the "Newgate Calendar" for a biographical dictionary.

A less offensive type of the same tendency leads some people to find apparent satisfaction in the discovery and proclamation of slighter defects in the habits of good men and the conduct of public institutions. They cannot talk about the benefits conferred by a great hospital without lamenting some insignificant blot in its laws, and some trifling want of prudence in its management. Speak to them about a man whose good works everybody is admiring, and they cool your ardour by regretting that he is so rough in his manner, or so smooth, that his temper is so hasty, or that he is so fond of applause. They seem to hold a brief requiring them to prove the impossibility of human perfection. They detect the slightest alloy in the pure gold of human goodness. That there are spots in the sun is

with them something more than an observed fact, it takes rank with *à priori* and necessary truths.

If native kindness or Christian charity has taught men to think generously of the character of others, it is still possible for this miserable cynicism to find its prey in infirmities or imperfections which involve no guilt. This is a comparatively innocent amusement, but it betrays a certain intellectual vulgarity, and is morally mischievous, as all real vulgarity must be. There are people who, if they hear an organ, find out at once which are the poorest stops. If they listen to a great speaker, they remember nothing but some slip in the construction of a sentence, the consistency of a metaphor, or the evolution of an argument. While their friends are admiring the wealth and beauty of a tree whose branches are weighed down with fruit, they have discovered a solitary bough, lost in the golden affluence, on which nothing is hanging. In the gun trade there are men whose occupation it is to *sight*

the barrels and detect any fault in the bore; it is said that a good eye will discover a deflection measuring very much less than a thousandth part of an inch. Not less keen in the detection of small flaws in every work of genius — poem, oration, building, statue, or painting — are certain critics, some of whom air their powers in drawing-rooms and at dinner-tables, and some of whom find their way, now and then, into print. Poor Hazlitt was sorely troubled with them in his time. "Littleness," he said, "is their element, and they give a character of meanness to whatever they touch. They creep, buzz, and fly-blow. It is much easier to crush than to catch these troublesome insects; and when they are in your power, your self-respect spares them."

Suppose that this habitual depreciation of character never sinks into actual falsehood and slander, and that every fault alleged, or hinted, or suspected, can be proved; suppose that this ignoble criticism is not ignorant blundering, and that every imagined

imperfection is real;—is a carping, cynical temper much less censurable, or are the words it prompts much less injurious? The influence of talk of this kind is gradually to lead people to believe that there is nothing in this world which it is safe to trust, honourable to love, or discriminating to admire. Reverence for saintly goodness vanishes; gratitude for kindness is chilled; and that enthusiastic admiration of great genius, which communicates to common men something of the strength, and inspires them with something of the dignity, belonging to genius itself, is ignominiously quenched.

It is a Christian grace to have pleasant and affectionate thoughts about men, to rejoice in their excellencies, and charitably to forget, as far as may be, their shortcomings. It is the attribute of a pure and beautiful nature to have an eye quick to discern, and a heart warm to honour, all that is fair and bright and generous in human nature. The words which discourage the charity that "thinketh

no evil," and give keenness, if not malignity, to the discovery of imperfection, are "corrupt" and unwholesome; they are not to be spoken by ourselves, and are not to be listened to when spoken by others.

The habit of depreciation makes us think ill of men; the habit of complaint makes us think ill of God. It is at least as bad to disparage God's goodness as to disparage human worth. No doubt every man has his troubles. It requires little ingenuity to find them out. The greenest pastures are not always fresh; the stillest waters are not always clear. Until we reach the land where God will wipe away all tears from all eyes, and where "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain," it is in vain to expect perfect freedom from small anxieties and vexations, or any lengthened exemption from great troubles. The sun shines and the storm darkens

on the evil and the good; the rain falls in kindly showers and in destructive torrents on the just and on the unjust; and there are times when every man is ready to hate life, and to exclaim that all is vanity and vexation of spirit. But to be perpetually moaning and uttering words of complaint, is to permit a canker-worm to eat away the heart of gratitude, and to ruin all our joy. The cheerful acknowledgment of God's bounty is an element of holiness, and the spirit of thankfulness confirms faith, and makes the fires of love burn more brightly. But there are some people with whom it is almost impossible to live without being infected with discontent. Their words are sighs; they look despair. Their calamities are "new every morning." Their disease is contagious, and only a vigorous constitution can escape unharmed. If it is an evil thing to forget God's mercies, and to have our joy in His love repressed, those who are habitually complaining are guilty of speaking

"unwholesome" words. "Is any afflicted? Let him pray."

Then there are words which are properly called *worldly*, and which are most "corrupt" and mischievous. By "worldly" conversation, I do not mean what some good people mean when they condemn it. Talk about music, and art, and politics, and literature, is in itself not a whit more worldly than talk about cotton and hardware, duties and discounts. There may be as much "worldliness" in conversation about ecclesiastical affairs as in conversation about dress, or about a flower-show, or an archery meeting. It is the spirit, not the subject of our words which determines their moral character.

Of course, if a man has never looked on the face of God, and does not live under the control of the realities of the invisible world, his conversation will show no trace of faith in the Divine and the Eternal. Where the faith does not exist in the heart, it cannot be revealed in the words. But some men are hypo-

crites to their own hurt and disparagement. With a deep and vigorous religious life, they affect the manner of those who have no religious life at all. They like to travel *incognito*, and it cannot be said that their "speech bewrayeth them." They really care very little about the vanity of splendid furniture; but they sometimes talk as though human life had no higher end than to patronize upholsterers. They seldom think of their wine except when it is on the table; but they affect to be as absorbed in the discussion of *bouquets* and vintages as though they thought that to keep a good cellar is the supreme felicity of man. They have nothing of the epicure about them; but they pretend to an infinite interest in the science of cookery. In ethics they catch the tone of "society." Scrupulously honourable themselves, with a pure heart and an intense abhorrence of trickery and fraud, they half profess to accept a conventional morality which they inwardly despise. They are ashamed of their native

dialect, and speak the language of the Philistines. Instead of letting their real life live in their words, they disguise the "good fruit" which is natural to them, under habits of speech of a meaner growth. They too — so it would appear — believe there is nothing sacred in human nature, and nothing awful in human destiny.

They are guilty of speaking "unwholesome" words. All words which are not true to the whole nature of the man who uses them are "corrupt;" and words like these are, as the old writers would say, *impertinently* bad. Few of us, I am afraid, are so good that it is at all necessary for us to conceal our goodness. We may let what faith we have colour and shape our speech without claiming transcendent saintliness. This "voluntary humility" has pride at the bottom of it. It gratifies our self-conceit to feel that we are better than we seem.

The harm which the affectation of worldliness inflicts on others is obvious. Men are in sufficient

danger of forgetting God for it to be needless for those who remember Him to enter into a conspiracy to exclude all recognition of Him from their common speech. When, in the words of those who profess to be devout, there is no reflected light from heaven, unbelievers will be likely to maintain that faith in heaven is all a dream. It is not necessary to ask every man we meet to lay his hand on our breast that he may feel the beatings of our heart and know that we are alive unto God; but to affect the appearance of death, not to suffer the life which is in us to give colour to the face and animation to the eye—this is to do our best to persuade the world that spiritual death is the universal condition, and that "the gift of God" of which we speak is unreal.

Just now, one of the most prevalent forms which this ignoble affectation assumes is habitual flippancy and frivolity. Men do not care to seem too much in earnest about anything. Politics and religion—the social condition of the people—the morality of

business — are all treated as though they were materials for jesting. Get at the heart of the very men who are guilty of this trifling, and you will often find that they have strong convictions, and that when there is need of hard work and self-sacrifice in a good cause, they are ready for both. The "curled darlings" of the clubs fought like heroes at Inkermann and Balaclava. But it is the manner of the world to speak of nothing seriously, and so men invest even their firmest convictions with fantastic and grotesque absurdities. We have had a "Comic History of England" in our time,—a frightful indication of the extent to which the very idea of the sacredness of our national life has perished; and there are some men—not quite destitute of religious earnestness—who talk so lightly about religion when they talk of it at all, that they seem to have never felt the awfulness of the objects of religious faith. This incessant jesting must, in the long run, lessen a man's own sense of the gravity of

human life, and it is certain to impair the strength and authority of the moral convictions of those who are always listening to it. It is as absurd as it is injurious. Barrow, who himself might have outshone, had he chosen to do it, all the wits of Charles's Court, and beaten them with weapons like their own, but of a more dazzling blade, a keener edge, and finer temper, treated this folly with the severity and contempt it deserves. He says that "to affect, admire, or highly to value this way of speaking (either absolutely in itself, or in comparison to the serious and plain way of speech), and thence to be drawn into an immoderate use thereof, is blamable. A man of ripe age and sound judgment, for refreshment to himself, or in compliance to others, may sometimes condescend to play in this or in any harmless way. But to be fond of it, to prosecute it with a careful and painful eagerness, to dote and dwell upon it, to reckon it a brave or a fine thing, a singular matter of commendation, a

transcendent accomplishment anywise preferable to rational endowments, or comparable to the moral excellencies of the mind (to solid knowledge or sound wisdom, or true virtue and goodness), this is extremely childish or brutish, and far below a man. What can be more absurd than to make a business of play, to be studious and laborious in toys, to make a profession or drive a trade of impertinency? What more plain nonsense can there be than to be earnest in jest, to be continual in divertisement or constant in pastime, to make extravagance all our way and sauce all our diet? Is not this plainly the life of a child, that is ever busy yet never hath anything to do? or the life of that mimical brute, which is always active in playing uncouth and unlucky tricks, which, could it speak, might surely pass well for a professed wit?"

But very religious words may also be "corrupt."

They are worse than corrupt, if they are spoken with conscious insincerity; but where there is no deliberate hypocrisy, they may be so exaggerated and unreal as to do more harm than the grossest worldliness. When good men, who have no great religious fervour, use fervent language, which they have caught from others, or which was the natural expression of what they felt in other and better years, they cannot tell what a disastrous impression they produce upon keen and discriminating minds. The cheat is at once detected, and the hasty inference is drawn that all expressions of religious earnestness are affected and artificial. The honest and irrepressible utterance of strong conviction and deep emotion commands respect; but intense words should never be used when the religious life is not intense. Borrowed rhetoric and remembered passion impose on no one. The language of lofty and earnest feeling must be "fresh;" when it is "corrupt," a healthy taste nauseates it as repulsive

and unwholesome, and is in danger of regarding with disgust whatever looks at all lik it in all time to come.

Happy are the friends of those whose conversation "ministers grace to the hearers." It may not be always serious and grave, it may dance and sparkle like a mountain stream, but it is always pure and innocent; it may not be always soft and gentle, but when it is roughest it is as bracing as the north wind; it may not always be very "instructive," but it is as healthy as the scent of the heather, bright and cheerful as the morning sun, musical as the song of birds and the rustling of pines and the sound of running waters. And when it touches on the deeper subjects of human thought, it is as natural as a mother's talk to her child; every word is sweet and honest and true. Next to the interior consolation of the Holy Ghost, it is the best solace in times of trouble; and next to the

words of Him who spake as never man spake, it is the most subtle and yet the most effective stimulus to well-doing. No measured eloquence from the pulpit, no elaborated pleading in a book, ever penetrates so deeply as the wise and earnest words of a living man talking alone to the man he loves. Most of us need to be better and wiser than we are, to speak after this manner to the people about us, but we may all watch against "corrupt communications;" and when we cannot speak "wholesome words," we may at least be silent.

V.

ANGER.

IT is to be feared that many good people have very bad tempers. It is to be feared, too, that a bad temper is very often regarded as a misfortune rather than a sin. Men think that they are born to it; that it is no fault of theirs; that their temper deserves the sympathy of their friends rather than their censure. They seem to regard it very much as they would regard a heavy mortgage on an inherited estate, or any other evil which had come upon them from accident or from the wrong-doing of other people.

And yet there are terrible sentences in the New

Testament about unjustifiable and uncontrollable anger. To yield to ungoverned passion is to "give place to the devil." To be "angry without a cause" is to be "in danger of the judgment."

No doubt there are occasions when it is a duty to be angry; and whoever is *not* angry with his brother when there *is* a cause, neglects a duty. The constitution of our nature shows that anger is not always a transgression of the Divine law. We are so made that pity is not more naturally awakened by the sight of suffering, fear by the approach of danger, delight by the vision of beauty, gratitude by deeds of generous kindness, than anger by many kinds of wrong-doing. Bishop Butler says, "that anger, in its impulsive form, is intended to be a sudden defence against sudden injury, and to be a standing menace, in the form of settled resentment, against deliberate injustice;" but it has far higher ends to answer than mere self-defence.

The calm, passionless nature which is with some

men the highest type of goodness, is not the Christian ideal either of human or divine perfection. It was never yet associated either with saintliness or heroism. The men whose hearts never glow with enthusiasm at witnessing lofty self-sacrifice, never burn with indignation against cowardice, falsehood, and profligacy,—the men whose eyes never flash, whose pulse never quickens, whose words move on in an unbroken flow, and never rush along tumultuously, like a cataract, either in praise or blame,—never yet did any work worth doing either for God or man. They are mere machines, not living souls. They would be hardly the worse if they had no hearts at all. They may talk of principle being better than passion; "both are best;" both are necessary to a perfect life. It may be a less serious misfortune for the flesh to fall away, than for the bones to be broken or diseased; but the hard angular skeleton, scarcely concealed by the skin, is an ungracious and ghastly object; and unless the

solid framework of principle is well covered with the warm flesh and blood of kindly and generous passion, a man's character has neither health nor beauty.

The people who do us most good are those whose affections are as true to God and righteousness as their judgments and their consciences. Right principle is the logic of human character; right feeling is its rhetoric; it is the rhetoric by which we are strongly moved. If my friend's heart throbs faster when he speaks to me of the love of Christ, I not only see that I ought to love Christ, but my own heart begins to glow; if he quivers with indignation when he speaks of meanness, treachery, selfishness, I not only see that these things are evil, but I begin to abhor them.

Righteous anger, restrained but not quenched, has wonderful power in it. Adam Smith has accurately observed that "the proper expression of just indignation composes many of the most splen-

did and admired passages both of ancient and modern eloquence." But we have higher examples of it than the Philippics of Demosthenes or the Orations of Cicero against Catiline. The ancient prophets did not discuss the sins of the Hebrew people with philosophical serenity, nor condemn them with judicial calmness; some of their discourses are tempestuous with passion. The words of Christ Himself are often terrible from the indignation they express; gentle as He was, there was no weakness in Him. He looked upon hypocrites with "*anger*, being grieved because of the hardness of their hearts." His denunciations sometimes burn with a white heat. And the eternal God has not trusted to the calm appeal which His law makes to the conscience of man — "His *wrath* is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness;" "He is angry with the wicked every day." Perhaps one reason why modern preaching is less powerful than it might be, is because it does not

dwell sufficiently upon the depth and intensity of God's delight in man's well-doing, and the fierceness of His indignation at sin.

It is possible, then, to "be angry" and to "sin not." Jonah was mistaken when he said that he did well to be angry; but there are times when we do exceedingly ill if we feel no anger. To quote again from Bishop Butler, who has a far better claim to the epithet "judicious" than Richard Hooker: "The indignation raised by cruelty and injustice, and the desire of having it punished, which persons unconcerned would feel, is by no means malice. No, it is resentment against vice and wickedness, it is one of the common bonds by which society is held together, a fellow-feeling which each individual has in behalf of the whole species as well as of himself. And *it does not appear that this, generally speaking, is at all too high amongst mankind.*"

If we are like Christ, and bear the Divine

image, there are times when we shall be angry. Nor do I see any reason why we should never speak until our anger is over. Anger is meant to make the condemnation of sin more effective; to wait till it has cooled down is to forget that fire is sometimes wanted to subdue stubborn material as well as force. It is a great calamity to a child if its parents act on the foolish theory that they should never reprove or punish except in cold blood; some parents, indeed, have so little control over their passion, that to wait till their anger is over may be a humiliating necessity; but still the child suffers. There is nothing more intolerable than a cold censure for grave faults. It is infinitely worse to bear than indignation, and it is less effective. It looks like cruelty. It provokes resentment. The remembrance of it is like a cancer in the soul. Parental love must be strongly moved—moved with anger as well as sorrow—when a child has committed sin; if a parent waits until all the emotion

has gone, the reproof and the punishment have all the harshness of authority unalleviated by the tenderness of affection.

But anger, like every other active principle of our nature, may escape from the control of reason and conscience, and then it is most mischievous both to ourselves and others.

Fire mastered by man's skill, working even fiercely under his command, is one of his most efficient servants; but fire, in revolt against man's authority, is one of his most terrible foes. "Pride," says an ancient author, "robs me of God, envy of my neighbour, anger of myself;" he might have said, Anger makes me the slave of the devil, the curse of my neighbour, and my own worst torment.

Some people seem to live in a perpetual storm; calm weather can never be reckoned upon in their company. Suddenly, when you least expect it, without any adequate reason, and almost without any reason at all, the sky becomes black and the wind rises,

and there is growling thunder and pelting rain. You can hardly tell where the tempest came from. An accident for which no one could be rightly blamed, a misunderstanding which a moment's calm thought would have terminated, a chance word which meant no evil, a trifling difficulty which good sense might have removed at once, a slight disappointment which a cheerful heart would have borne with a smile, brings on earthquakes and hurricanes. People of this kind say they bear no malice; that their passion is soon over; that they do not "let the sun go down on their wrath;" but the mischief is that if one storm ends at nightfall, another is sure to begin at sunrise. This is hardly fulfilling the apostolic precept. As anger is sinful when it is without a cause, it is also sinful when too prolonged. God never meant us to "nurse our wrath." Severe remedies become dangerous when their action is not almost instantaneous. Prolonged anger is a torment instead of a chastisement to

those who have to endure it; however just in its origin, it is resented as a wrong; and hinders instead of encouraging penitence.

An angry man little knows the misery and injury he inflicts on those whom, perhaps, he truly loves. His wife and children are in continual fear. His violent language is not forgotten by others as easily as he forgets it himself. No bursts of "good-nature," no lavish gifts, atone for it. Very often his temper leads to habits of concealment and deceit on the part of those with whom he lives. For this he is largely responsible. If he has to do with public business, he drives away from every institution with which he is connected the quiet men who hate strife, and he makes the work of those who remain, a constant source of irritation and disgust. If the charity which "beareth all things" is the queen of the christian graces, the passion that bears nothing is one of the worst of unchristian vices.

Moralists have suggested many considerations which should help those who are guilty of this sin to check and master it. Perhaps one of the wisest and most charming passages which Archdeacon Paley ever wrote, is that in which he enumerates the reflections by which an angry man may subdue the rising storm. He says:—

"Reflections proper for this purpose, and which may be called the *sedatives* of anger, are the following: The possibility of mistaking the motives from which the conduct that offends us proceeds; how often *our* offences have been the effect of inadvertency, when they were constructed into indications of our malice; the inducement which prompted our adversary to act as he did, and how powerfully the same inducement has, at one time or other, operated upon ourselves; that he is suffering perhaps under a contrition, which he is ashamed, or wants opportunity, to confess; and how ungenerous it is to triumph by coldness or insult over a spirit

already humbled in secret; that the returns of kindness are sweet, and that there is neither honour, nor virtue, nor use, in resisting them:—for some persons think themselves bound to cherish and keep alive their indignation when they find it dying away of itself. We may remember that others have their passions, their prejudices, their favourite aims, their fears, their cautions, their interests, their sudden impulses, their variety of apprehension, as well as we: we may recollect what hath sometimes passed in our minds when we have gotten on the wrong side of a quarrel, and imagine the same to be passing in our adversary's mind now; when we become sensible of our misbehaviour, what palliations we perceived in it, and expected others to perceive; how we were affected by the kindness, and felt the superiority, of a generous reception and a ready forgiveness; how persecution revived our spirits with our enmity, and seemed to justify the conduct in ourselves which we before blamed. Add to this the

indecency of extravagant anger; how it renders us, whilst it lasts, the scorn and sport of all about us, of which it leaves us, when it ceases, sensible and ashamed; the inconveniences and irretrievable misconduct into which our irascibility has sometimes betrayed us; the friendships it has lost us; the distresses and embarrassments in which we have been involved by it; and the sore repentance which, on one account or other, it always costs us."

But bad temper will never be conquered till it is felt to be a sin—a sin which every Christian man is bound to repent of and to forsake. It is not difficult to persuade people to acknowledge this in general terms, but the acknowledgment is vitiated by excuses which show that the guilt is not honestly recognized. No man ever thinks of defending himself against the charge of dishonesty or falsehood, by pleading that his proneness to the sin diminishes his responsibility; but proneness to violent and ungovernable anger is constantly urged as a palliation

of the offence. It is one of the most mischievous characteristics of this sin, that it almost always claims to be the necessary result of peculiarity of temperament. I have not unfrequently heard men speak of it as though it were a mere physical infirmity; and as though we had no more right to blame a man for his temper than for the colour of his eyes, his complexion, or his hair. So long as this excuse is admitted, conscience is silenced, and there can be no vigorous attempt to reform.

No doubt a man's physical constitution has very much to do with his temper. There are people to whom it is no great credit to be gentle and kindly. They are kept from violent passion, not by the strength of right principle, but by the sluggishness and weakness of their pulse. But it is the business of man's reason and conscience to tame the waywardness of animal impulses, and to compel them to serve the soul. If temperament is to be an excuse for causeless and excessive anger, the glutton and

the drunkard may appeal to their physical constitution as an alleviation of their guilt, and many of the foulest offences may take shelter under the same convenient plea. Even the moralist refuses to admit that the soul has any right to excuse its wrong-doing by alleging the strength of the lower passions; it is the soul's darkest crime, as well as its deepest degradation, to be unable to control them. The Christian who supposes that there are sins which the Holy Ghost cannot enable him to subdue, dishonours "the exceeding greatness of that power," which worketh in all that believe. There is no sin for which Christ atoned from which He cannot deliver us. There is no sin that He can pardon which He cannot give us strength to overcome. If there were fetters He could not break, diseases He could not heal, our trust in Him as our Saviour would be gone.

Let men consider what they are saying when they imply that a bad temper cannot be overcome. It is

not an isolated evil, a mere local affection which leaves the rest of the soul uninjured. By it we are often betrayed into words and deeds most cruel and unjust; it causes us to inflict undeserved misery; it violates the laws of charity; it hinders communion with God; it often mars if it does not destroy our religious usefulness.

Nor should the angry man forget that the very "temperament" which occasions his sin, and which he sometimes pleads in alleviation of his guilt, renders possible forms of excellence which are unattainable by men whose blood is sluggish, and in whose souls no fire burns. Many of the very noblest men that ever lived had slumbering volcanoes in them. The heat and impulse and vehemence which, when unrestrained, hurry us into harsh and unmeasured and violent language, become, when controlled, an element of invaluable power. Rapture in worship, zeal in Christian work, ardour in friendship,

enthusiastic loyalty to a just and righteous cause—these are all possible to men whose passions are impetuous. There is hardly any other sin which lies so near to great virtues. Let anger be mastered, and there is not only a great evil escaped, but the same force which wrought the former mischief gives inspiration and nobleness to the whole moral life.

VI.

CHEERFULNESS.

THE only crown that Christ ever wore on earth was a crown of thorns; and in ancient prophecy He was spoken of as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" as if, in this world of pain and disease and disappointment and death, none would ever know, before He came, the real heart of suffering or the last depths of woe. When He was here, the sick and the wretched gathered about Him; and ever since He left the world, His name has been on the lips of men far oftener in their trouble than in their joy. And as it is the sorrowful rather than the happy who come to Christ,

sorrow is also a universal element of the Christian's life, — sorrow for the sufferings of Christ, sorrow for our own sins which made those sufferings necessary, sorrow for the sins of other men whose hearts the love of Christ has not yet touched to penitence or inspired with a passion for holiness. The Christian faith has revealed unexpected depths of pathos in the human soul; and in Christian literature there is so much of sadness, and Christian art, as it has been recently said, has so "deep a moaning in it," that in the judgment of Augustus Schlegel, while the poetry of the ancients is the poetry of enjoyment, that of the moderns is the expression of unsatisfied desire. Christianity has been called the religion of sorrow.

But surely too much has been made of the more pathetic elements of the Christian faith and life. Instead of defining the religion of Christ as the religion of sorrow, I should prefer defining it as the religion of consolation.

It is quite true that Christendom has encouraged what a Catholic writer calls "a holy melancholy." For myself, I find nothing holy in it, and the means which have encouraged it appear to me flagrantly unchristian. What right have we, for instance, to make a crucifix the centre of Christian worship? Could the angels of the sepulchre revisit the world again, and appear in their own shining forms in the cathedrals and churches of Continental Europe, they would point with gestures of amazement and grief at the images of Christ's last agony, around which the millions of the Catholic Church continually gather; they would repeat the words which they uttered eighteen centuries ago to the sorrowing women who had come in the early morning to render to the dead body of Christ the last offices of despairing love. They would exclaim again, "He is not *here*"—not in the sepulchre—not on the cross—"He is risen." If the death of Christ, while still holding the supreme place in the

memory of the Church, no longer concealed from us His present power and glory, much of the "holy melancholy" which has been mistaken for devoutness would disappear.

There is a tradition that our Lord, though He often wept, never smiled. I should like to know on what that tradition rests. I know that instead of affecting a rigorous and austere life, He was found at the tables of all sorts of men, so that His enemies called Him a glutton and a wine-bibber; and instead of discouraging the harmless festivities of life, He turned water into wine, that the rejoicings at the marriage of His friend might not be abruptly closed.

The ideal saint is not to be found in the New Testament; — I mean the saint with the pale countenance, the wasted form, the hands clasped in continual prayer, the lips closed in continual silence, the rough garment, the austerities, the self-inflicted chastisements, which are necessary to the

popular conception of the character. Peter was not a man of that kind, nor Paul, nor John. It is said that James the Just lived a severe life, and that he knelt so constantly, that his knees were like the knees of a camel; it may have been so, but tradition on such points is not very trustworthy; and, anyhow, no prophecy or epistle in the Old Testament or the New exhibits such a representation of the ideal Christian life for us to honour and imitate. The writer to whom I referred just now, as admiring "holy melancholy," appeals to John the Baptist as an example of severe saintly virtues; but it is enough to say that our Lord Himself not only spoke emphatically of the very great contrast between His own manner of life and John's, but said, "the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

I have known some eminent saints — people who loved God with a great love, trusted Him with a perfect faith, kept His commandments, and lived and

moved and had their being in the light of the Divine presence — but they were not at all of the sort that artists delight to paint and poets to celebrate. They were not melancholy, ghastly, sorrow-stricken persons at all. They were brave and hopeful; they heartily enjoyed the pleasant things of life, and made light of its sorrows. Some of them had humour and wit, an eye that twinkled merrily, and a laugh that rang like a peal of bells. In health and strength, they were the kind of people that take sunlight with them wherever they go; and in sickness they preserved an indomitable cheerfulness. I do not say that all very good people are always happy; but my impression is, that the very best people I have ever known, the people who have had least sin and selfishness in them, and most of the Spirit of God, instead of being characterized by a "holy melancholy," had "a merry heart," which Solomon says, "doeth good like a medicine."

The melancholy, wasted saint is not the true Protestant ideal of saintliness. Luther himself would never have done his gigantic work as a great popular reformer but for his physical robustness; and his habits were as far as possible from asceticism. The Puritans were, no doubt, inclined to sternness and severity; and Lord Macaulay says that they objected to bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators; but my impression is, that many of them were very far from being grim and gloomy. John Owen—who may be taken as a very fair example of the Independents of the Commonwealth—was as graceful and accomplished a gentleman, as polished, as courteous, and as free from artificial and conventional restraints, as can well be imagined. When he was a student he delighted in manly exercises—in leaping, throwing the bar, bell-ringing, and similar amusements; he learnt to play the flute, the fashionable instrument for gentlemen in

those days, from the most celebrated performer of the time, who was also tutor to Charles I.;—and when Owen became Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, he made his old music-master professor of music in the university. He was a very different kind of person, even when he became Vice-Chancellor, from what those of us would imagine, who suppose that the saints who reigned under Cromwell were a mortified race of men. The historian of the University of Oxford is very severe upon the great Independent for not being sufficiently dignified and solemn in his dress. "Instead," says Anthony Wood, "of being a grave example to the university, he scorned all formality, undervalued his office by going in quirpo" (whatever that may be) "like a young scholar with powdered hair, snake-bone band-strings"—that is, band-strings with very large tassels—"lawn bands, a very large set of ribbons pointed at his knees, and Spanish leather boots, with large lawn tops, and his hat mostly cocked;" all of which means that John

Owen was too much of a dandy for Anthony Wood, who hated the Puritans and all their doings. John Milton taught that there was a time to laugh as well as to weep, and in one of his sonnets invites his friend Cyriac Skinner "deep thoughts to drench in mirth that after no repenting draws," and, having said,—

> "To measure life, learn thou betimes, and know,
> Towards solid good, what leads the nearest way,"

he adds,—

> "For other things, mild Heaven a time ordains,
> And disapproves that care, though wise in show,
> That with superfluous burden loads the day,
> And when God sends a cheerful hour refrains."

There are, no doubt, times when joy is impossible. When the heart is broken it cannot be "merry." But it is necessary for some people to remember that cheerfulness, good spirits, light-heartedness, merriment, are not unchristian nor unsaintly.

We do not please God more by eating bitter aloes than by eating honey. A cloudy, foggy, rainy day

is not more heavenly than a day of sunshine. A funeral march is not so much like the music of angels as the songs of birds on a May morning. There is no more religion in the gaunt naked forest in winter, than in the laughing blossoms of the spring, and the rich ripe fruits of autumn. It was not the pleasant things in the world that came from the Devil, and the dreary things from God; it was "sin brought death into the world and all our woe;" as the sin vanishes, the woe will vanish too. God Himself is the ever-blessed God. He dwells in the light of joy as well as of purity, and instead of becoming more like Him as we become more miserable, and as all the brightness and glory of life are extinguished, we become more like God as our blessedness becomes more complete. The great Christian graces are radiant with happiness. Faith, hope, charity—there is no sadness in them:—and if penitence makes the heart sad, penitence belongs to the sinner, not to the saint; as we

become more saintly, we have less sin to sorrow over.

No, the religion of Christ is not a religion of sorrow. It consoles wretchedness and brightens with a divine glory the lustre of every inferior joy. It attracts to itself the broken-hearted, the lonely, the weary, the despairing, but it is to give them rest, comfort, and peace. It rekindles hope; it inspires strength, courage, and joy. It checks the merriment of the thoughtless who have never considered the graver and more awful realities of man's life and destiny, but it is to lead them through transient sorrow to deeper and more perfect blessedness, even in this world, than they had ever felt before the sorrow came.

Take the representations of the Christian faith which are given in the New Testament, and you will see that, though it may be a religion for the sorrowful, it is not a sorrowful religion. To hearts oppressed with guilt, it offers the pardon of

God; to those who dread the Divine displeasure, it reveals God's infinite love; to those who are tormented with the consciousness of moral evil, and penetrated with shame and self-contempt by the habitual failure of every purpose and endeavour to live a pure and perfect life, it offers the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. If, at the commencement of the Christian life, it relies on the purifying power of penitence, and if to the very end it encourages devout and reverential fear, it also teaches that the joy of God is our strength; and it is an apostolic precept that we should Rejoice evermore. As for the chief troubles which annoy and distress mankind, it possesses the only secret which can make them felt less keenly, and borne without that bitterness of spirit which poisons grief and transforms a calamity, morally harmless, into a curse and a sin. It tells the anxious to cast all their care upon God, and to "take no thought for the morrow;" the poor, that they may be heirs of

a divine glory; those who have had heavy losses, of riches which never take to themselves wings, and treasures of which they can never be robbed; it tells those who have suffered from injustice and calumny, of a righteous Judge and an equitable judgment-seat; it reveals to the sick a life of immortal health; and to those whose hopes are wrecked in this world, a world beyond death, in which they may have a career brighter and more triumphant than their happiest imaginations can conceive. Nor is it silent and helpless when those we love pass from us and are laid in the dust. It was not Christ who brought death into the world; nor by rejecting Christ can we or our friends become immortal. The brain burned with the fires of fever, the limbs were struck with paralysis, the harmonious movements of the heart were troubled with fatal disease, before Christ came; and these evils would continue in the world if all memory of the Christian faith perished. But to the

dying, and those who mourn for the dead, Christ reveals glory and immortality as the certain destiny of all who love and fear God. It does not become a Christian to be "melancholy."

It was the fashion thirty years ago to think that habitual melancholy made people interesting. When Lord Byron's poetry was most popular, it was a mark of distinction to be consumed by a hidden grief, to talk of a desolate life, to have a countenance pale with unutterable misery. There are still some very young persons whose health is not very good, and whose brain is not very sound, who affect this poetical gloom. Let me assure them that, instead of making them interesting, it makes them extremely unpleasant, and that all sensible people regard this affectation with contempt.

There are other persons who have a most surprising genius for making the most of all the prosaic troubles of life. You never see them but

they have some new calamity to talk of. At first, and until you come to understand them, you think them the most afflicted of mankind, and your sympathy is touched by the look of distress which has become habitual to their countenance, and by the tone of despair which is hardly ever absent from their voice. But you discover by-and-by that they are not worse off than other people. They have no severe sickness in their house; they are not in danger of bankruptcy; they eat well and sleep well; their children are not idiots or cripples; —why should they be always miserable? They have somehow got into the habit of being so. They carry about a moral microscope, which makes revelations to them of which other people are happily ignorant; no matter how clear the water is, they can always see in it disgusting creeping things. Every ache in their limbs is a threatening of horrible agony; every odd feeling the symptom of latent and, perhaps, mortal disease; if a chance

dimness comes over their eyes, they are certain they will soon be blind; if they strain a tendon, they make sure of being lame for life. They see the dark shadows of dreadful vices in the slight follies of their children. They see impending ruin if their income falls five per cent. They think of the affairs of the world much in the same way, and make ready for the battle of Armageddon if the French emperor adds a few thousand men to his army. It is hard to say how this unfortunate habit is to be cured, when once it is formed. It is not of much use telling these people to mix in cheerful society; it is only a rare cheerfulness which can last very long in their presence. It is not of much use telling them to visit the sick and the poor, to learn what real trouble is, and so escape from imaginary evils; for however much good such visits might do to themselves, the unhappy victims of their sympathy, instead of being consoled and strengthened by their kindness, would only discover,

after they had left, that their troubles, which seemed bad enough to bear before, have somehow been magnified and made more intolerable than ever. People of this sort are to be pitied, and all about them are to be pitied too. The only use, perhaps, that can be made of them is to take warning from them not to indulge too freely in the luxury of woe; it becomes a species of moral dram-drinking or opium-eating, from which, when once yielded to, it is almost impossible to escape.

Solomon was right—"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine." The Hebrew is rather more expressive than the English, and also more just. For medicine, though it may do us good, often does it in a very unpleasant way, making us miserable and disconsolate at first, though we are brighter and better for it afterwards. Cheerfulness, if a medicine at all, is medicine of a very agreeable kind. The Hebrew might read, translating it freely, "A merry heart keeps the body

healthy and sound, makes a wound heal quickly, so that the *bandage* may soon be *removed*." What a relief it is, after a limb has been long bound, to have the bandage taken off! How welcome the freedom from restraint! How welcome the sense of recovered soundness! That is the kind of feeling which the proverb says comes from a cheerful heart; it keeps the body wholesome, so that if a wound comes it is soon cured. A moody spirit, like an unhealthy physical condition, makes slight wounds dangerous, and the cure very protracted and wearisome.

If it be a part of Christian charity to alleviate the miseries of mankind, then the cultivation of a cheerful spirit is a Christian duty. Why should you lighten the sorrows of the poor by your alms, and make your own house miserable by your habitual gloom? And if you have learnt anything of human nature, you will know that among the

pleasantest things that can find their way into a house where there is anxiety and want, are the music of a happy voice and the sunshine of a happy face. The best person to visit the aged and the poor—other things of course being equal—is the one whose step is the lightest, whose heart is the merriest, and who comes into a dull and solitary home like a fresh mountain breeze, or like a burst of sunlight on a cloudy day. No one can make a greater mistake than to suppose that he is too cheerful to be a good visitor of the sick and the wretched. Cheerfulness is one of the most precious gifts for those who desire to lessen the sorrows of the world. It can do that which wealth cannot do. Money may diminish external miseries; a merry heart can, for the time at least, drive the interior grief away.

It is possible to cherish and encourage this spirit of joyousness, even where it is not the result of natural temperament. Consider what it is that de-

presses you and makes you gloomy. If it is the consciousness of sin, often confessed, never heartily forsaken, appeal to Him who can purify as well as pardon; master for a single week the temptation to which you habitually yield, and you will find yourself in a new world, breathing clearer air, and with a cloudless heaven above you. If it is incessant thought about your own personal affairs, escape from the contracted limits of your personal life by care for the wants of others. Determine, too, to think more of what is fair and generous and noble in human nature than of what is contemptible and selfish. Those who distrust the world and think meanly of it can never be happy. There is sin enough, no doubt, both in ourselves and others; but there is more of heroic goodness, more of saintly self-sacrifice, more of geniality and kindness than some of us seem to suppose. It makes my heart "merry" to think of the patience and courage with which many whom I know are bearing heavy troubles;

the generosity with which some of the poor relieve the distresses of those who are more wretched than themselves; the firmness which some are showing in the presence of great temptations to wrong-doing; the energetic devotion of others to the highest welfare of all whom their influence can reach; and I believe that a hearty faith in the real goodness which adorns and ennobles mankind, is one of the best aids to that cheerfulness of spirit which will enable us to add to the general sum, at once of the happiness and virtue of our race. Christ has not come into the world for nothing. His work has not been a failure. We may recognize in multitudes the bright image of His own perfections. The invisible Spirit is revealed in the visible excellences of innumerable Christian people, who "add" to their "faith, virtue . . . knowledge . . . temperance . . . patience . . . godliness . . . brotherly kindness . . . charity." The morbid anatomy of human souls is not a pleasant study; I doubt

whether it is very profitable; I am sure it is very depressing. I prefer to thank God for the spiritual health and strength of those in whom I see His promises translated into facts; and if sometimes it is necessary to dwell upon the moral evil which clings even to good men, and upon the terrible depravity of the outcasts of Christian society, I find in Him a "refuge" from the sore "trouble" which the vision of sin brings with it. He is ready to pardon the guiltiest, and to bring home to Himself those who have gone farthest astray.

Why should those who have seen God's face be sad? "In His presence," both on earth and in heaven, there is "fulness of joy."

"Hence loathed Melancholy,
Of Cerberus and blackest midnight born,
In Stygian cave forlorn,
'Mongst horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy;
Find out some uncouth cell,
Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous wings,
And the night-raven sings;
There under ebon shades, and low-brow'd rocks,
As ragged as thy locks,
In dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell."

VII.

THE DISCIPLINE OF THE BODY.

DURING the last fifteen years, quite enough has been said about the sanctity of the body; and the protest against the strange fancy that we honour and please God by impoverishing, torturing, and marring the beauty of what He "curiously wrought," has run into extravagance. A few sensible men proclaimed war against the saintliness of physical weakness, filth, and suffering; and before long their wholesome doctrine was incessantly reiterated with all the passion of fanaticism in every part of the country; the new gospel found its way into innumerable sermons

and lectures, into the columns of every newspaper and the pages of every popular magazine. "Great was the company of the preachers." The "tub" became a means of grace; and a clean skin the sure means of getting a clean heart. Volunteer regiments were addressed as though they were religious orders, destined to regenerate the moral life of the nation. Cricket, rowing, running and jumping, were to do men more good than praying; and the "trainer" was to accomplish the work which the preacher and the philosopher had attempted in vain.

No doubt it is a very fine thing for a man to be able to walk forty miles a day, but that does not make him a saint. There is no virtue in being sickly; but neither, so far as I can see, is it the highest attribute of piety to have the digestion of an ostrich, or the lungs of a racehorse. Many a fool has had muscles of iron and nerves of steel; and I imagine that it is even possible to be a

member of the Alpine Club, and yet to break all the Commandments.

Still it is true that both the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures speak of our physical nature with honour. They never represent the body as the work of some inferior and perhaps malignant deity, who so contrived it that we should be constantly tempted to sin. It is God's own handiwork—"fearfully and wonderfully made." It is the visible temple of the Holy Ghost—the only visible temple in which God has dwelt since the glory passed away from the inner sanctuary at Jerusalem. Death is not to destroy it. Sown in corruption, it is to be raised in incorruption; sown in weakness, it is to be raised in power. The Incarnation and the prophecy of the Resurrection have finally redeemed it from contempt. That God was manifest in the flesh is the fundamental article of the Christian creed; and when we listen to the desolate words, "dust to dust, ashes to ashes," we confidently

believe that the time is coming when "all that are in the graves" shall hear the voice of the Son of God "and shall come forth;" that the gracious form and the kindly face have not vanished for ever; that the body, not the same flesh and blood indeed, but still the body which it has been pleasant for us to look upon on earth, will reappear among the shining splendours of heaven.

The body, therefore, with its instincts and wants, is not to be treated as the enemy of the soul, but as its friend—a friend of inferior rank, but still a friend. It asks for warmth and clothing, food and shelter, and for ease and rest after labour; and it should have them all. Let men say what they will in praise of the celestial influence of hunger, whether voluntary or involuntary, it is difficult to see that hunger encourages any human virtue, or any Christian grace. As for a hard and severe life, as a rule, it is probably as injurious to the intellect and the heart as it certainly is to physical health and

beauty. When the Apostles warned men against "fleshly lusts," there is no reason to suppose that they meant to require Christian people to live a life of discomfort and privation.

But that it is necessary, if we are to live a pure and devout life, that we should firmly control our inferior instincts and passions, has been the common faith of all saints; and carelessness in the discipline of the body is, perhaps, the real cause of the miserably ignoble life of many Christian men. They have no strong and clear vision of God, no vivid anticipation of everlasting blessedness and purity. Their love for Christ smoulders like a half-extinguished fire—without heat, without brightness, without intensity. "Fleshly lusts" unsubdued are the true explanation of their moral weakness and spiritual sluggishness. If a man is conscious that his spiritual nature has no elasticity, that his religious life is dull and heavy, that his prayers have no heart in them, and his thanksgivings no rapture,

that his Christian work is feeble and mechanical, a burden to himself and no blessing to others, let him ask whether the flesh has not mastered the spirit, and set himself vigorously to assert his freedom.

Let him ask himself, for instance, whether he would not be a better man if he drank less. It is not merely men who drink till they are drunk who are guilty of intemperance; there are many people who do what is perhaps worse than that. I have heard able medical men give it as their deliberate opinion that a man who gets drunk once a month receives less physical injury than a man who never loses self-command, but drinks habitually more than he ought. Which suffers most morally, it may be hard to determine. Unhappily, drinking which does not end in positive intoxication is regarded as innocent. The men who are guilty of it would resent even an implied censure on their excesses. They think they "live freely," but that they are blame-

less. Their friends become used to their habits; mere acquaintances say that they never seem very bright or active, but charge them with no sin; their own consciences are drugged into silence; but all moral nobleness and all lofty devotion inevitably disappear from their character. It will not do to speak of excessive drinking as a vice of which only the poor are guilty. No rank or culture exempts us from danger. Medical men have assured me again and again that in houses where no one would suspect it, actual drunkenness is the real cause of apparently inexplicable illness. Now and then I have been shocked at finding that women, educated women of good family, and occupying a good social position, are guilty of it. There are circumstances which make the temptation to this vice specially perilous to women whose circumstances exempt them from the necessity of earning their own bread. Take the case of a young girl whose home before marriage was a very bright and merry one; she

was surrounded with brothers and sisters and troops of friends; her mind was occupied with her music, her drawing, and her books; two or three times a year she made long visits to relatives at a distance; she was as free from care as the lilies that neither sow nor spin, or as the birds of the air that make the spring-time merry with their songs; her whole life was joyous, varied, and animated. After marriage she has to spend the greater part of nearly every day at home and alone. Her husband leaves her directly after breakfast, and does not return till night. She has her home and servants to attend to; but to a bright clever girl the management of household affairs is apt to become depressing. She has children by-and-by, perhaps, but the society of children does not give her the intellectual stimulus and excitement to which she has been accustomed. Her heart dies down. She gets weary of the grey dull sky under which she lives, and the habit steals upon her almost insensibly of taking stimulants to

make her pulse beat faster and her spirits move more lightly. If she does not break it off at once, she is lost. Let her do anything that is at all innocent to escape from her doom. Let her get to her music again, or to her drawing; let her spend her time in dressing herself daintily, or in manufacturing the gossip which is common at morning calls; better still—if she can—let her give herself vigorously to some kindly, womanly, Christian work for the poor, in which she can find a real interest. Anyhow, let her get some colour, some animation into her life from harmless sources, or else she will soon be ruined; unless she can find healthy excitement somewhere, the dulness, stillness, and sameness of her life will be her destruction.

There is another vice to which we Englishmen are specially prone. Our climate makes a large amount of solid food necessary to us, and for want of genius to do better we eat grossly. We have no

scruples about it. We are ravenous and voracious, and feel no self-reproach. I am inclined to think that good cookery might do at least as much for the morals of the country as gymnastics. Dine in Paris on fourteen courses, and you feel lighter and brighter when you have finished than when you began; "do justice," as the phrase is, to an English dinner of the old-fashioned sort, and, without the liberal assistance of sherry and champagne, you are too stupid to talk of anything except local politics and the state of the crops. French wines will never become popular in this country till we get French cooks. The ethics of dining is a neglected branch of the science of morals which urgently requires investigation. Meantime, let men remember that excessive eating is a foul and disgusting vice; its evil effects may be less obvious than those of excessive drinking, but they are not less real, perhaps they are not less serious. All the finer sensibilities of the soul, all moral grace and beauty,

are perhaps more certain to perish in the glutton than even in the drunkard.

The moral degradation which comes from another "fleshly lust"—physical indolence—it is less easy to define. Most of us may thank God that the very circumstances of our life keep us safe from this sin. Few men can help working; most men have to work hard. But sluggishness, an indisposition to make any exertion unless compelled to make it, is sometimes to be met with even in this restless and active age, and in every social condition. I mean that there are people who can never be induced to put out their strength, and who never do anything with their "might." We all know men who continue to the end of their days "unfulfilled prophecies;" who have shown in their youth the promise of high achievement, and perhaps the sign of genius, but who leave the world with their fortunes unmade, or their poems unwritten, or their

schemes of philosophy unorganized, or their social and political reforms unattempted. Such men are often illustrations of the failure that is the inevitable penalty of indolence. Its moral effects are not less disastrous.

As for some of the tests of sluggishness which are often to be found in good books written for young people, it is difficult to see their value. I cannot perceive, for instance, what virtue there can be in getting up several hours before daylight in the month of January. To make early rising, *for its own sake*, one of the cardinal virtues, has always seemed to me utterly preposterous. Why should we not wait, as Charles Lamb puts it, till the world is "aired" before we venture out? If a man can do more work in the day when he lies till half-past seven, than when he gets up at half-past five, if he is better tempered at breakfast-time, if his mind is fresher and his heart kindlier, for the rest of the day, it passes my comprehension why he should turn

out at the earlier hour. Some people think he ought; and I have honestly tried to discover some intelligible explanation of what seems to me this singular article of faith, but I cannot. If, through rising late on week-days, a man has to hurry away to business without family prayer, if his temper is ruffled morning after morning by the haste and disorder in which it involves him; if he gets up so late on Sunday that he has to make a violent effort to reach his place of worship in tolerable time, and gradually comes to think that he is quite early enough if he is in his seat five minutes after service has begun, then of course he is to be blamed; but though I have a real respect for traditional wisdom, I have never been able to understand why a man should get up at unseemly hours in the night for the mere sake of doing it.

There is a sluggishness, however, which is fatal to manly energy and Christian earnestness. Some men fall into such physical habits that they never

seem to be fairly awake. Hard work of every kind, whether of muscle or brain, they systematically evade. They "take things easy." They "do not excite themselves." They think they are very harmless, and even very praiseworthy people; and do not see that indolence has grown upon them till the soul is no longer master of itself, or of the body which ought to serve it. The immorality of their life it may perhaps be impossible to make clear to them; but they may be made to perceive that habits which destroy all intensity and depth and vehemence of religious feeling must involve them in guilt. Every spiritual impulse is enfeebled, every devout affection is deadened, every act of worship is made a weariness, by the sluggishness into which they have permitted themselves to sink. The fiery chariot in which the soul should rise triumphantly to heaven in exulting praise and rapturous adoration has had all its splendours quenched; now and then they may be feebly stirred by the fervour and

passion of men of nobler temper, but it is only for a moment; "of the earth, earthy," they have become incapable of the diviner movements and joys of the spiritual life.

Very wonderful is the intimate connection, the subtle interaction, between the forces of our physical and moral nature. It is one of the chief mysteries of our mysterious being. But it is not a mystery merely; it is a fact of infinite practical significance which cannot be ignored without grave peril. The intelligent recognition of it would save many good people from much sorrow, as it would save others from grievous sin. I should like to have the "Diaries" which record the spiritual experience of certain excellent persons, illustrated with notes by wise physicians who had known them intimately. Periods of spiritual desertion, when "the light of God's countenance" was hidden from them, apparently without any reason, might receive a very

instructive explanation. It might be found that God had been less arbitrary, or as they would say less *sovereign*, in His treatment of them than they supposed. I once tried whether the strange vicissitudes of glory and gloom which occurred in the interior life of an eminently good man could be accounted for by the physical causes which his own diary suggested; and though the materials at my command were, of course, very imperfect, as I had never known him, and could only infer what his physical history was from accidental and fragmentary hints occurring here and there among the record of his labours, his thanksgivings, his confessions, and his bitter cries to God for the restoration of spiritual joy, the attempt was not altogether unsuccessful. A wise discipline of the body would free many a devout soul from the evil thoughts with which it is haunted, and which are supposed to come from evil spirits, from the gloomy fears which are interpreted as signs of a deep-rooted unbelief, and

from the despondency which is regarded as the result of the Divine displeasure.

Let no one suppose that I ascribe to merely physical causes all the unspeakable joy and all the unspeakable agony which find a place in the spiritual history of every man who is endeavouring to live, and move, and have his being in God. This material universe may be an illusion; its stars and suns, its mountains and oceans, may all be a mere fleeting show, projected by the action of the powers of my own inexplicable nature, and without any solid and substantial being; but that my soul is saddened and blessed by its failures and triumphs, by the eclipse of the Divine glory, and by the recovery of the beatific vision—this I cannot doubt. It is, however, equally certain that body and soul, flesh and spirit, are so strangely blended, that the lights and shadows which chase each other across our interior life, do not all come from the upper heavens. By honouring the laws of our physical

nature, some of us might come to live a more equable spiritual life.

As for "fleshly lusts" which betray us into positive sin, the line of duty is simple and definite—we must "abstain" from them. Every man must learn for himself where his own danger lies, and then must resolve, at whatever cost, to escape it. Our choice lies between yielding to the degrading bondage which has made us despise ourselves, and a life inspired with the Holy Ghost,—a life of strength, joy, and blessedness. It is of no use to try to pray, unless we "abstain" from that which makes prayer dull and heartless, and renders us incapable of receiving the very blessings we ask for. It is of no use to try to meditate on the majesty and goodness of God, unless we "abstain" from that which almost incapacitates us for lofty meditation, and which, if for a moment we are swept upwards among the harps and songs of angels, sinks

us down at once into our earthly dust again. For some men to rise to a nobler life it may be quite as necessary to eat less as to pray more; to spend less time over their wine as to spend more time over their Bible; to ride, to walk, to run, to bathe, as to engage in regular and earnest Christian work.

We *wait* for the redemption of our body; but we must not wait for the Resurrection to liberate us from "fleshly lusts:" these "war against the soul;" and unless they are resolutely resisted and subdued, the soul may be in peril of final destruction.

VIII.

PEACEABLENESS AND PEACEMAKING.

HALF the quarrels in the world are occasioned by men who think themselves great lovers of Peace. But "by peace," said Richard Baxter, who was a keen observer of human life, as well as the keenest logician that has appeared in Europe for the last three centuries—"by peace, some men mean the quiet undisturbed enjoyment of their homes, wealth, and pleasures . . . and the conditions on which they would have it are, the compliance of all others with their opinions and wills, and humble submission to their domination, passions, or desires." Such men often think that if other people would only

be as reasonable as themselves, and exercise as much self-control, quarrels would for ever cease. They have no malignant delight in strife. They are annoyed and shocked by the display of angry passion. They wonder at the selfishness of mankind. They believe themselves to be among the most peaceable of the human race, and cannot understand why they cannot get through the world without quarrelling.

There are other men, not of this tyrannical kind, who never pass a day without driving quiet, amiable people almost wild, but are quite unconscious of their guilt. Because they never give way to violence of temper, they imagine that, whoever else may be responsible for the angry passions which do so much to mar the happiness of life, they are free from blame. They do not seem to know that they manifest, in their whole spirit and bearing, a cynical indifference to the tastes, convictions, and opinions of those about them, a cool assumption

of infallibility, an offensive disrespect for every one's judgment but their own, to which it is not in human nature tamely to submit.

Then there are people who secretly cherish the conviction that their relatives do not regard them with sufficient affection, that their opinions never receive sufficient deference, or that their services to their friends or to the public are not sufficiently recognized. However this conviction may be suppressed or disguised, it gives a certain acrid flavour to everything they say, and influences the very tone of their voice and the very expression of their countenance. There is always something about them which shows that they believe themselves to be ill-used men. Meet them accidentally in a railway-carriage or a coffee-room, and you feel that they and the world are not good friends. They are plaintiffs in a suit to which all the rest of mankind are defendants. Even if they are ashamed of what they feel, and try to wrestle it down, the

inward struggle and discomfort interfere with repose, simplicity, and kindliness of manner; spite of themselves, their wounded self-esteem gives them an air of discontent which is sure to disturb the temper of every one who comes within their reach.

If a man has come to believe that most people are disposed to take offence when no offence is intended; if he thinks that nearly all his friends are hasty and irritable; if he finds that in his office, or his warehouse, or the committees to which he belongs, there seems to be a constant tendency to misunderstandings and petty quarrels;—he should ask whether it is not his own fault. For it is quite certain that really quarrelsome people are not very common. Most of us dislike wrangling; mere indolence makes us dislike it. Nine people out of ten will give way on small points rather than have the trouble of fighting for them; and a great part of the business of the world is got through pleasantly and amicably. Till our pride is offended

by some man's superciliousness, or our temper irritated by the perverseness, or vanity, or indolence, with which perhaps the guilty individual may never reproach himself, most of us are disposed to be quiet and good-humoured. As soon as any one discovers that the atmosphere about him is nearly always stormy, he should ask whether, without knowing it, he does not carry the elements of the storm with him. It is tolerably certain to my mind that whoever believes that most men are quarrelsome, is not only not a peacemaker—he is not even peaceable.

Peaceableness is not to be confounded with cowardice. Men who always run away when there is danger of a fight, no matter how necessary the fight may be to resist injustice or to expose error are not to mistake their want of courage for the spirit of charity. Nothing would be easier than to live a quiet life, if we were at liberty to throw off God's uniform, and leave other men to defend

the cause of righteousness and truth. To evade all unpleasant duties, to refuse all public offices in which we are likely to be brought into collision with rough and selfish and ignorant men, never to touch political contests or religious controversies, because we do not like to risk losing the kindly feeling of our neighbours and friends—this is neither a human virtue nor a Christian grace. Deserters must be flogged, even if they plead that their hearts are too tender to fight.

In this soft and unheroic age it is very necessary to remind good men that "the wisdom which cometh from above is first *pure*—then peaceable." It is not our supreme duty to live in "inglorious ease." Neither the State nor the Church will be saved by men who shrink from conflict and let things take their course, through an ignoble sensitiveness and moral effeminacy. We want more iron in our blood, and more courage in our hearts, to do the work which these agitated and perilous times

require. We are no longer called to the old romantic forms of martyrdom, but those to whom God has revealed a truth are bound at any cost to bear witness to it. And the penalties of fidelity are, perhaps, sometimes as hard to bear in our day as they were in the days of our fathers. To incur the open and violent hostility of bad and cruel men, is in some respects a less severe test of loyalty to conscience and to God, than to endure the suspicion, the censure, the misconception, the hard words of men whom we honour and love, and whose kindly feeling and confidence it would be a happiness to preserve. But the cause of charity as well as of truth, sometimes requires us to subject ourselves to the charge of uncharitableness; and, however it may be in politics, it is certainly very often true in other provinces of human activity and thought, that an honourable and lasting peace can be secured only by war.

But it is possible to have a peaceable spirit even

when engaged in a sharp struggle for what we believe to be right and good. In contending for great principles, it is not necessary to give way to bad passions. I am half afraid that Paul and Barnabas had a downright quarrel about Mark, though they became good friends again afterwards; but when Peter diplomatized at Antioch, and Paul "withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed," we have no reason to suppose that any harm came of it. And it is perfectly easy to remain on good terms with some people, though you and they differ on very grave questions; while it is very hard to keep right with others from whom your differences are comparatively insignificant. Everything depends on the spirit in which truth is maintained. A peaceable man will avoid whatever can justly provoke personal hostility. He will not seize accidental advantages which have no real connection with the principles at issue. He will take all the care he can to understand the real

position of his opponents, that he may not, even unintentionally, misrepresent them. He may appeal to passion—for passion is sometimes the best ally of truth and justice—but he will never appeal to prejudice, nor to any passion that is not noble and generous. He will never wish to humble, ridicule, irritate, and pain the conscientious advocates of error; the firmest hostility to false opinions is perfectly consistent with hearty esteem for the men who profess them. Even if they seem to him unfair and ungenerous in the weapons they use, he will not judge them too severely; he will be more ready to suspect himself than to censure them; he will be more anxious to keep himself free from blame than to brand their faults. Famous soldiers have been chivalrously generous; and, with a courage that no storm of battle could shake, have had a heart as kindly and soft as the south wind; and some of the most "peaceable" men I have ever known are men whose allegiance to truth has forced

them to engage in severe and protracted controversies.

As mere cowardice is sometimes mistaken for peaceableness, sometimes mere inoffensiveness and weakness of character are mistaken for it. What Pope said in his sharp cynical way about "most women" is certainly true about many men—they "have no characters at all." It is impossible they should ever quarrel. They cannot. They have no opinions which they can call their own; no preferences, no dislikes. They are not strong enough to keep even a prejudice. They have nothing to quarrel for. In the course of an hour they will passively agree to a long succession of opinions, no two of which can possibly be held by the same man at the same time. The hare is not peaceable because it runs away from the hounds; it is simply frightened. And men who have no intellectual vigour to grasp a principle firmly, or no moral vigour to maintain it—men who cannot define for

themselves a distinct line of action, or who, if they can, are incapable of resisting the persuasion of the first friend who asks them to change it, may have other virtues, but they have no right to claim respect for their weakness, and to expect the honours which are to reward those who "seek peace and ensue it."

Peaceableness is something much better and nobler than this. It is a form of that charity which "suffereth long and is kind . . . envieth not . . . vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things; believeth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things." And when this spirit reaches its highest development, a man becomes, not peaceable merely, but the author and giver of peace to others.

Without this, let no one suppose that he can

have any success in reconciling enemies, or restoring the mutual confidence of friends whom misapprehensions, conflicting interests, hot temper, and hasty words have temporarily estranged. Solomon said long ago that "he that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears," and those who are always interfering in other people's quarrels "with the best intentions," but with the worst results, deserve to have their hands bitten and torn, and to be laughed at by the bystanders for their pains.

These would-be peacemakers are sometimes prompted by a fussy liking for managing the affairs of their neighbours; they are the "busybodies" for whose benefit St. Paul wrote the very practical precept, "that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread"—a precept in which there is a touch of impatience and a trace of contempt; he could hardly help contrasting his own deep and intense concern about "the things of others" with

the miserable and mischievous imitation of it. Sometimes their meddling comes from sheer conceit; they believe that they have great diplomatic power. They mistake a smooth insinuating manner, and an unfailing stream of weak and watery commonplaces, for eloquence; and are confident that the stormy waves of passion will become smooth as soon as the sweet oil of their tedious and soporific talk begins to flow. Sometimes they are attracted by the moral dignity which belongs to any man who is accepted as arbitrator in a dispute. They like to feel the contrast between their judicial calmness and the gusty temper of the disputants. In imagination they sit on the bench, clothed in spotless ermine, and surrounded with an atmosphere of untroubled serenity. The consciousness of their moral superiority to the plaintiff and defendant wrangling at the bar, is very soothing; and if they could only get their sentence accepted as the settlement of the suit, their bliss would be perfect. Such peace-

makers as these embitter and prolong the quarrels they mean to terminate, just as men who think they can quiet a noisy meeting by shouts of "order" and "chair," and by dignified and benignant gestures addressed to the excited crowd, only make the confusion worse confounded.

Success in this delicate and difficult task requires what may be called a very lofty kind of moral genius, such as few of us possess. There must be a hearty hatred of the evil passions which strife provokes, and not merely a dislike of the discomfort and annoyance which quarrelsome people inflict on all their friends and acquaintances. There must be a generous affection for those who are at variance. I have no faith in your cool judicious men as mediators. It is not false reasoning which makes people quarrel; and sound reasoning about their mutual misunderstanding will not make them friends again. When they are ready to discuss their differences calmly and quietly, the quarrel is over; and

if they cannot dispose of remaining difficulties themselves, the arbitrator they call in is a mere pair of scales or yard measure—a simple mechanical contrivance for insuring mechanical accuracy. What two men want whose ill-temper and mutual distrust are daily becoming worse, is a common friend whose hearty affection for both of them will utterly drive away their evil thoughts, as the rush of the north-west wind sweeps the clouds before it, and as the victorious sunlight scatters the darkness of night. There are people of that kind. Their face, their voice, their tones, their gestures, are all "conductors" of a mysterious but most divine force, which is not to be resisted. It is not an open question with them whether the estranged friends they mean to reconcile are to forget their estrangement. They do not diplomatize. They act like the forces of nature. Their success is not always immediate; but to themselves it is never doubtful. The sun does not lose heart when the blossoms of spring

are a fortnight later than usual; time may be lost through the east wind and cold rains; but the blossoms will come at last, as a matter of course; in the struggle with old winter he was never beaten yet. It is just so with those genial people who are born to be peacemakers. They have received their "gift from God," and a wonderful gift it is. Happily, not evil diseases alone are contagious: the most generous moral affections are contagious too.

Men and women of this kind—and perhaps there are as many women as men in whom this glowing and intense generosity colours, suffuses, and penetrates the whole character and life—have an instinctive faculty for recognizing the genuine goodness which is concealed from the sight of most of us by follies of manner, and perhaps by some annoying peculiarities of temper and habit. There are very few people in whom there is not something to admire and love, and, as some one has said, when great sorrows cause all the masks and disguises of

the inner life to fall away, and the true soul is revealed, we often discover an ideal beauty and nobleness where we had seen nothing but what was commonplace and mean. But this was discovered long before, by those who are endowed with the keen and quick eye for all that is fairest in the nature of those about them, which seems to me indispensable to a true peacemaker. I cannot trust the man who sees only my faults. There is often more of moral energy in my baffled efforts to break a bad habit than in the "good works" which win me most honour; my defeats are often more heroic and glorious than my victories. The bright vision of a perfect goodness which haunts me night and day, and towards which I am slowly and painfully struggling, more truly belongs to me, though as yet beyond my reach, than any of the stains and deformities which men censure in my outward conduct; what I love and strive for—that is part of my true life; what I hate and recoil from, even though I

am sometimes betrayed into it—that I repudiate; the guilt of it is mine, but it has no lasting root in my moral being; "it is not I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." When my friend really judges me thus, and does not pay me mere compliments on my honest intentions,—compliments intended to soothe my vanity for the moment, but which have no real sincerity and value,—I can leave myself in his hands. All distrust vanishes. He sees me as I am. If he would have me acknowledge a fault, I acknowledge it. Somehow I feel that he not only sees my true interior life himself, he has revealed it to my enemy, and I can retract my own hasty words, or forget the words by which I have been wronged, without losing my self-respect. He reveals my enemy to me, and in the man with whom I had quarrelled, I now see a worth, integrity, and kindliness to which my passion had blinded me. A hearty and honest reconciliation is effected.

Some intellectual tact and discrimination may

perhaps be necessary now and then, to disentangle the differences which have created bad blood; but in most cases the moral element is of supreme importance. It is this which brings a dead friendship out of the grave in which it was fast corrupting; the intellect only unbinds the grave-clothes, that the movements of the recovered life may be free.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." To "the poor in spirit," and to those who are "persecuted for righteousness' sake," Christ promises mere citizenship in "the kingdom of heaven;" the peacemakers are to receive more distinguished honour. Christ came to make peace between man and God, and to make peace between men themselves; those who had been trying to do the same work, though in an inferior form, He is prepared to recognize at once as His brethren, and as the true children of His Father. Even before they acknowledge His

authority they have the rudiments of His own character, and are influenced by a spirit corresponding to His own. When those who have known how to reconcile enemies are themselves reconciled to God, their natural virtues develop at once into the purest and fairest graces of the divine life. They are capable of the nearest access to God's presence, and the most intimate fellowship with His bliss.

IX.

THE PERILS AND USES OF RICH MEN.

"'THE Perils of Rich Men!' Well, whatever the perils may be, I am safe enough from every one of them for many a long year to come. If some one who knows all about it would only tell me how to *get* rich—how to get rich soon, honestly, and without too much trouble — I should feel infinitely obliged to him; but this WEEK-DAY SERMON on 'The Perils and Uses of Rich Men' is about as worthless to me as a paper on the Dangers of Alpine Ascents to a gouty old gentleman of seventy, or as Mr. Jeavons' book on our Coal Supply to an inhabitant of the planet Mercury."

But let not the indignant reader, who is about to pass over this homily in disgust, be too hasty. It is not merely the man with half a million, or a hundred thousand pounds, or even twenty thousand, who ought to think seriously of the Perils which threaten rich men. Wealth is a relative term. When a working man has become a small manufacturer on his own account, or a clerk has got a share in his former master's business, and is receiving four or five times the income he used to live upon a few years ago; when his earnings are gradually creeping up from a couple of hundred pounds to three hundred, and from three to five, and from five to a thousand, he may be in quite as much danger from his prosperity as the great capitalist whose speculations affect the stock-market of every European capital, or the peer whose revenues and splendour fill the princes of many a small kingdom with envy. Every one who is what we call "well-to-do," be he merchant, manufacturer,

professional man or tradesman, every one whose income gives him a broad margin beyond his necessary expenditure, every one who is free from the pressure of anxiety, and has something laid by for years to come, is exposed more or less to the kind of dangers against which the "rich" have to guard.

One of the principal perils of rich men arises from their very exemption from many temptations to gross sin. They have no occasion to steal to satisfy their hunger. They are not driven to any of the very doubtful financial schemes and tricks and shifts to which a man who is hard pressed is likely to resort. They are not tempted to "grind the face of the poor" and to deal ungenerously or unjustly with their dependents, in order to keep their income and their expenditure on good terms with each other. Hence they are apt to think too well of themselves. They are not tempted "as other men," and they think that they are stronger and better than other men. The young man having

" great possessions " who came to Christ had never been sharply and severely tried. Had he been poor, he might have been betrayed into many sins, but being rich, he had kept all the commandments " from his youth up." People in easy circumstances cannot tell what grievous offences they might have committed had they not been sheltered by their position, almost from the very possibility of committing them.

Nor is this all. The rich man finds it very easy to do many kindly acts. He can cause the widow's heart to " sing for joy " without depriving himself of a single comfort or even a single luxury. Without any self-denial his ears may be filled with the blessings of those who were " ready to perish." Other men speak well of him, approach him with respect, address him courteously, compliment him on his generosity. If he has faults, he is not likely to hear them roughly rebuked; and if he has virtues, many tongues will celebrate them.

It is very natural, therefore, that he should regard his own character and life complacently, and that he should think severely of the sins and selfishness of those who are less fortunate than himself. But this self-complacency and these hard thoughts of others are very unfriendly to the spirit and temper without which no man can "enter into the kingdom of heaven." They make him forget his need of God's mercy and the renewal of the Holy Spirit.

Again, the rich man's Bible, with its morocco binding and gilt edges, has very much less in it than the poor man's Bible, bound in sheep, which cost him tenpence, or at most half-a-crown. Whole pages are absent from the more costly copy. Pages which are read and re-read, which are marked and scored and thumbed in the one, are virtually mere blank paper in the other. "Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap; yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them." "He will

regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." "He giveth food to the hungry." "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." These texts and fifty more may, perhaps, be on the printed page over which the eye of a rich man runs, but to him they are almost unmeaning: to the poor they are like angels' music; he dwells upon syllable after syllable; they live in his heart; they are his strength and his solace in the rough hard life which has fallen to him; when he reads them it is as though God Himself were at his side.

As the rich man loses many of the revelations of God's sympathy, compassion, and care, which inspire the poor with intense and passionate gratitude, so he

loses some of the most urgent motives to communion with God, which often make the poor man devout. There are some who cannot understand how it is that rich people, even if they are really religious, seldom attend public worship on week evenings; while the poor, who have had a hard day's work, contrive to be present. I see no cause for surprise or perplexity. When the anxieties of life are exhausting the heart, it is a great relief to lose them, even for an hour, in the eternal rest and calm of the Divine presence. The poor man, if he is a Christian at all, longs to catch the inspiration and stimulus of common prayer and common thanksgiving in the middle of the week as well as on Sunday. His troubles drive him to church, and the habit of frequent attendance at worship often remains when the original and urgent reason for it has passed by.

The prosperity of the rich provides them with refreshment, recreation, and amusement. They have a thousand sources of happiness within their reach.

They have agreeable excitements of which the poor know nothing. To the poor, religious work and religious thought often take the place of the pleasures of the wealthy. Excluded from the comforts, the luxuries, and the entertainments which money alone can procure, they throw their strength into humble forms of Christian service, and find in that an excitement which breaks the monotony of life and a most animating joy. When a man's circumstances become brighter, we too often find that he gradually withdraws himself from the good works of his less prosperous days. He gives more, but he leaves the labour to others. He has new interests, and the old zeal dies down. He was an industrious Sunday-school teacher when his home was lonely; and almost the only pleasant society he had was among those who were engaged in the same work as himself; the *esprit de corps* was strong upon him; he delighted in the good he was doing, and all his enthusiasm and strength were absorbed in it. But when wife and

children come, and when he has a pleasant garden to walk in on Sunday afternoon in summer, and can roll his easy chair in front of a comfortable fire on Sunday afternoon in winter, his work is given up—given up very often under the plea that it is his duty to teach his own family. If he *does* teach them, that may be a very good reason for staying away from the Sunday-school; but the mere fact that it is his duty to teach them is no reason at all. He visited the sick and the poor when his own rooms were small and meanly furnished; but when he moves into a handsome house and can keep a good table, he begins to like to have his friends about him and to spend his evenings at home. What pictures and music supply to prosperous people who have taste, what eating good dinners and drinking good wine, and popular entertainments, supply to prosperous people of another sort, those who have not these enjoyments within their reach find in attendance at worship and

in Christian work, — recreation, refreshment, and change.

I remember to have seen the question very sharply and clearly put by a shrewd Roman Catholic writer—though his answer to it did not satisfy me —"*Why are there any rich people at all?* and what does God mean by them? . . . They are not made rich," he says, "for their own good, that is quite plain. A man's good consists in the saving of his soul; but it is plain that riches do not help him to save his soul, rather the contrary." And he solves the difficulty by saying they were meant "to be the prey of the poor." . . . "The poor are God's eagles to beset, infest, and strip the rich. . . . Are the poor wearisome, grasping, unseasonable, insatiable, unreasonable, unbearable? It is more unreasonable in thee to complain; they were meant to prey upon thee." The answer does not satisfy me; but the question deserves looking at. Why is it, since riches are so perilous to men, that God permits men to

become rich? The very virtues of a man's character create the riches which make salvation difficult. Why is it that the laws of God's providence reward industry, skill, uprightness, with temporal prosperity, if temporal prosperity makes it harder for a man to "lay hold on eternal life?"

The answer to this question ought to teach us the "Uses of Rich Men." The writer I have just quoted has missed his way through forgetting that men are not born into this world simply to "save their souls." To escape eternal death is not the solitary object of human life. Our supreme glory is that we can know and love and serve God; but God has given us faculties and affections which are not exclusively religious.

The perfection of man's nature is derived from the development of a great variety of powers. God has made man capable not only of religious duty and joy, but of many beautiful and noble things besides. The genius of the artist, the sculptor, the

poet, is a divine gift, and illustrates the divine greatness more wonderfully than all the majesty and splendour of the material universe. If "the heavens declare God's glory and the firmament showeth His handiwork," the intellectual faculties which He has conferred upon our race, and which find their development in literature and art and science, reflect upon the Creator a glory still more sublime; and it is not generally among the poor that the resources of genius can be fully revealed. The gift and faculty divine may be conferred upon those who are destitute of external advantages, but there are a thousand forms of intellectual power, the results of which can have little attraction for the vast majority of those whose days are spent in exhausting and anxious toil; so that if genius is given to the poor, as it often has been, it is among those to whom wealth affords leisure and the means of intellectual culture, that the creations of genius are most fully appreciated. But for the existence

of a large class of people, free from the harassing cares of an incessant struggle for bread, the higher forms of civilization would decline and perish. One reason, then, for which men are born to wealth, and for which they are able to accumulate wealth, is this, not that they may spend it in vulgar and offensive ostentation or self-indulgence, but that they may have the opportunity of cultivating their own intellectual nature, and that, by doing this, they may assist in elevating the general culture of their countrymen; for the refinement and intelligence which ought to accompany riches will not be confined to the rich; they will find their way, sooner or later, to the humblest ranks of the State.

Again, the very means which enable some men to accumulate wealth improve the condition and multiply the comforts of the poor. The amazing progress of our manufacturing and commercial industry during the last fifty or sixty years has no doubt augmented the luxury and splendour of

living of those who enjoy hereditary wealth, as well as made our merchants princes; but its effect upon the circumstances of the poor has been still more remarkable. Wretched as the condition of vast numbers of our people is at this moment, what would have been the misery of the whole of our working population but for that commercial prosperity which has given to many of our manufacturers and merchants great fortunes? Some of the necessaries of life are harder to get now than they were a century ago, but this is the natural result of the great increase of population within the narrow limits of this small island—an increase attributable only in part to the development of our industrial activity. It is impossible not to see that the natural tendency of every new application of scientific discovery to the arts is to improve the condition of the poor. A century ago the princes, the nobles, the great merchants, had at their command all the elements of a luxurious life; but the inven-

tions of the intervening years have brought within the reach of the comparatively poor what were then the exclusive privileges of the wealthy.

It is one of the incidents, then, of the increase of the general prosperity of the country that some become enormously wealthy. Nor is this all. Accumulated wealth is not all spent in what the economists call "unproductive expenditure." It is invested in great undertakings, which would never have been attempted had there not been a large class of persons whose income was considerably in excess of their actual wants. New processes of manufacture requiring costly and untried machinery, railways, ocean telegraphs, mines,—these find employment for the surplus income of the rich, and they ultimately benefit the poorest in the land. The great capitalist, if a Christian man, does not "live for himself," even when he is investing his money with the hope of earning twenty per cent. If he is using it honestly and carefully, if he is

engaged in genuine transactions, and not in mere gambling, he is increasing, not his own wealth merely, but the wealth of the whole nation.

Another end for which rich and prosperous men exist is that they may attend to public business. A good man to whom God has given the capacity for understanding and vindicating the laws on which our national security, freedom, and progress depend, and who is born to high social rank, need be in no great difficulty to find the reason why he occupies his exalted position. He is there that he may use his intellect, his education, and the influence of his position to improve the laws of his country, and to do whatever can be done by political means to advance the highest interests of the nation. He is there, not to be "*the prey of the poor*,"—but to study how their true interests may be promoted by legislation, and to help in conducting the business of the State on behalf of those of his countrymen who have no time or no

qualifications for duties of that order. Prosperous men belonging to the middle classes have their public functions too. They ought to feel "called of God" to act as "Guardians of the Poor." They ought to work on the Committees of Hospitals. They ought to be Aldermen and Town Councillors. They ought to give their time as well as their money to whatever improvements are intended to develop the intelligence of the community. They ought to be reformers of local abuses. They ought to see to it that the towns and parishes in which they live are well drained, well lighted, and well paved; that there are good schools for every class of the population; that there are harmless public amusements; that all parochial and municipal affairs are conducted honourably and equitably. In nearly every part of the country I hear that prosperous manufacturers and merchants are leaving public duties in the hands of men of lower position and culture than themselves. They shrink from the

roughness of local elections, and from the alleged coarseness of language and manners of the actual leaders of local parties. But this is to forget that self-denial must be endured in the discharge of nearly every duty. And if they were more active and energetic, the power which is now in inferior hands would be their own. Even the mob prefer a gentleman to a blackguard, in the long run. When the prosperous people of a free nation cease to take an active interest in the public life of the towns and cities in which they live, the political greatness and stability of their country are exposed to the most serious dangers.

Again, there are rich people in the world in order that the varieties of moral and spiritual excellence among men may be increased. The circumstances in which a good man lives are like the soil and the climate in which a plant grows. There is every variety of zone in the moral as well as the material world, that the moral life

may assume an infinite variety of leaf and blossom and fruit. If—almost impossible hypothesis—you are disposed to complain that God has made you rich because riches make it much harder for you to serve Him, remember that He wants to have in Heaven some whose affections clung to Himself on earth, though the earth was very bright and fair to them; that He wants to have some living in close and blessed communion with Him now, to whom He is not a refuge in times of trouble, but the chosen home and palace of their souls. Multitudes will be honoured at the last day, because they endured the hardships of this life without impatience; but God wants some to receive His praise, because their love for Himself and their faith in things unseen were too strong to be mastered by all the pleasures and delights which this world can give. I know—for Christ has said it, and observation confirms it—that "it is hard for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of

Heaven," but if, spite of the difficulty, he does serve God, he shall have the nobler reward.

Another reason why God has made some men rich and prosperous is, that they may be able to do much by contributions of money, as well as by personal service, to maintain and diffuse the truth of God among mankind, and to alleviate the wretchedness and diminish the crimes which endanger and disgrace this Christian nation. The command which our Lord gave to the young man, to "sell all that he had and give to the poor," was not intended to have a universal application. He came to Christ as to a prophet, and he came with an uneasy consciousness that though he believed he had kept the commandments, there was still something wanting, and he wanted Christ to tell him what it was. His sorrow, when he was commanded to sell his goods and give to the poor, showed him that he was not prepared to do whatever the prophet required — that much as he desired

eternal life, he loved his riches better still. It was a command intended to reveal to the young man himself what he had not suspected, that he cared more for his wealth than for the favour of God. It was not meant to be a law for all mankind.

But that it is the duty of the prosperous to give their money largely for the honour of God and the welfare of mankind, needs no demonstration. The duty is acknowledged even by those who neglect it. It is not the judgment which needs convincing, but the heart that needs to be fired with devotion and charity, and the conscience that needs to be strengthened in her condemnation of selfishness.

In what ways rich men can use the harvest of their industry, or their hereditary wealth, for the most noble ends, it is unnecessary to explain. They know that nearly every great religious society is cramped in its operations by deficiency of

income; that new missions might be established in heathen countries, if only the money could be had; that new churches are necessary in the colonies; that half Europe is open to Protestant evangelical work, but that the work cannot be done because there are no funds to do it with; that there is not a large manufacturing town in the country where thousands might not be spent wisely in the erection of schools; that Bible women and city missionaries might be multiplied by the score, if there were only the means of supporting them at our command.

But not merely in forms like these may those of my readers who are rich be "rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate." In the streets along which some of you go every day to your business, in the courts which surround your shops and warehouses and manufactories, there are sufferings which the public provision for the poor cannot remove. Among the poor them-

selves there is constantly manifested the noblest and most practical sympathy for each other in their sorrows, but it is for you to give effectual relief. You may find sickness aggravated by destitution. You may find families which once lived in abundance dragged down by irresistible misfortune to beggary, and shrinking with a natural instinct from applying to the law for relief. You may find widows and orphans struggling for a livelihood, and barely keeping themselves from starvation. You may find little children growing up untaught because of the poverty of their parents, who would gladly see them at school. You may find girls beginning a life of infamy to provide an aged mother with bread.

There are many grounds on which men come to be remembered after the grave has closed upon their coffins and their souls have returned to God. A great picture, a noble poem, a righteous law, these have perpetuated through centuries the name

of artist, poet, or statesman; but fame of this kind is beyond the reach of most men. I can tell you of honours which shine with a still brighter and more enduring lustre, and which will lose none of their splendour when the art and literature of the world have perished, and when constitutions and laws, with the nations they blessed, shall have been dissolved for ever. You may write your names on tablets more lasting than marble—on the grateful memory of human hearts, which shall bless you through eternity for the consolation you brought them when, in their despair, they were ready to curse God and die, for the timely help which saved them not only from suffering, but from sin. It is "hard for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven," but it is easy for him to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, to provide instruction for the ignorant, to send the gospel to the homes and hearts of men. And by doing this he will become safe from the dangers

which riches bring with them, for "Blessed is he that considereth the poor,"—his "secret" alms shall be "rewarded openly,"—his "righteousness endureth for ever."

X.

AMUSEMENTS.

SINCE Jeremy Taylor and Richard Baxter, English Protestantism has had no great casuists. Nor is this to be regretted. Simplicity, robustness and manliness of character, are seriously imperilled whenever the conscience is perplexed by the refinements and intricacies in which casuistry delights. It is safer to leave men to the guidance of those great and obvious moral laws whose authority every pure and honest heart acknowledges. The maxim, "Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves," may convey sound advice to a man who wants to build up a fortune, but it is

utterly false when applied to the culture of character. Not the minor details of conduct, but the supreme objects of human life and the broad principles of integrity and honour, should receive our chief thought. To be more anxious to avoid little sins than to develop great virtues, will produce an effeminate moral delicacy, instead of an heroic vigour; and people who are very scrupulous about small matters, are often miserably weak in the presence of great temptations. There is a moral and religious valetudinarianism which is ruinous to moral and religious health. If a man's physical constitution is sound, a few general principles will guide him better than a whole encyclopædia of minute regulations about "what to eat, drink, and avoid." A healthy appetite, vigorous exercise, pure air, temperance in all things, and adequate rest, will do far more to keep him in good health than taking incessant drugs and measuring his bread and meat by ounces. And let a man have

a fervent love for what is pure and just and honourable: let him have a cordial abhorrence of what is sensual, mean, tricky, and ungenerous, and he will not go far wrong.

It may be said that casuistry is necessary for spiritual "directors," just as medical science is necessary for doctors. But Protestantism has, very wisely, made no provision for placing sick souls under the care of spiritual physicians. Casuistry and the Confessional go together, and we have renounced them both. Our principle is, that the soul is safest in God's hands; that no man, whatever his sanctity or knowledge of human nature, or skill in ethical analysis, is competent to "direct" another man's moral and spiritual life. The diseases to be remedied are too subtle, the symptoms, for the most part, too vague and indefinite, to make an accurate diagnosis possible; and the "treatment" is beyond the resources of all human wisdom. The only sound method of training men to purity, integrity,

and honour, is to let them know the broad outlines of God's law, and then to trust them to the light of conscience and the teaching of the Holy Ghost. Moreover, most of the moral evils from which men suffer will not disappear under direct remedies; what is necessary is, the development of positive loyalty to God, and goodness.

Practical questions may sometimes actually arise about which an honest man may be in doubt, and practical questions may be imagined which only an expert could answer; but Jeremy Taylor says, very admirably, that "the preachers may retrench infinite number of cases of conscience, if they will more earnestly preach and exhort to simplicity and love; for the want of these is the great multiplier of cases. Men do not serve God with honesty and heartiness, and they do not love Him greatly, but stand upon terms with Him, and study how much is lawful, how far they may go, and which is their utmost stretch of lawful,

being afraid to do more for God and for their souls than is simply and indispensably necessary: and oftentimes they tie religion and their own lusts together, and the one entangles the other, and both are made less discernible and less practicable. But the good man understands the things of God; not only because God's Spirit, by secret emissions of light, does properly instruct him, but because he has a way of determining his cases of conscience which will never fail him. For, if the question be put to him whether it be fit for him to give a shilling to the poor, he answers that it is not only fit, but necessary, to do so much, at least, and to make it sure, he will give two; and in matter of duty he takes to himself the greater share; in privileges and divisions of right, he is content with the least; and in questions of priority and dignity he always prevails by cession, and ever is superior by sitting lowest, and gets his will, first, by choosing what

God wills, and then what his neighbour imposes and desires." *

As for such questions as good Richard Baxter raises in his "Christian Directory," many of them are so easily solved by plain common sense, others are so frivolous, and others arise from such exceptional conditions of human life, that it was hardly necessary to discuss them. Who, for instance, need make it a matter of solemn inquiry whether or not it is lawful "for a person that is deformed to hide their deformity by their clothing? and for any persons to make themselves (by clothing, or spots, or painting) to seem to others as comely and beautiful as they can?" It is to be hoped, too, that husbands and wives are very seldom perplexed with the question "what to do in case of known intention of one to murder the other?" Nor were the men of the Commonwealth at all what I take them to have been, if

* Ductor Dubitantum, Works, vol. xi. 366.

they needed to be told what must be done "if a gentleman have a great estate, by which he may do much good, and his wife be so proud, prodigal, and peevish, that if she may not waste it all in housekeeping and pride, she will die, or go mad, or *give him no quietness*"—poor gentleman! What a man's duty would be "in so sad a case," most husbands would determine without Richard Baxter's assistance, by the help of a certain rough instinct, teaching them that when

> "Adam, the goodliest man of men since born
> His sons; the fairest of her daughters, Eve,"

were created, they appeared to the angels, whether good or bad,

> "Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed;
> For contemplation he and valour formed,
> For softness she and sweet attractive grace;
> He for God only, she for God and him.
> His fair large front and eye sublime declared
> *Absolute rule.*"

And if a text was needed, the unhappy "gentleman" would be likely to remember what St. Paul

said about the husband being the "head of the wife," even as Christ is the Head of the Church.

But if, in our days, and among English evangelical Christians, a casuist happened to appear, I do not know that he could, in any way, more usefully or more pleasantly employ the resources of his science than in discussing the subject of this paper. What amusements are lawful to persons who wish to live a religious life, is one of the questions by which many good people are sorely perplexed. The stricter habits of our fathers are being everywhere relaxed, and there are very many who wish to do right, who know not what to think of the change; they yield to the current of the times, but yield with hesitation, discomfort, and apprehension.

At first sight, some of the distinctions which have been drawn between amusements which are permitted and amusements which are forbidden,

appear to be altogether arbitrary. They seem to originate in no moral principle — in no spiritual instinct. Why, for instance, should bagatelle be played on winter evenings in very strict families and billiards be sternly condemned? Why should whist stamp a man as "worldly" and chess be perfectly consistent with devoutness? Why should draughts be allowed and backgammon abjured? Why should fishing be permitted even to clergymen, and shooting be regarded by many as a sign of unregeneracy? Why should people take their children to a circus who would be horrified at their seeing a pantomime?

The things allowed are so like the things abjured, that the distinction which has been drawn between them will probably be pronounced by many persons to be altogether irrational. No sensible man, however, will ever suppose that strong convictions which extend through large communities are altogether without foundation in reason or experience.

If he cannot understand them, he will acknowledge that it may perhaps be his own fault. Nothing lives without a real root somewhere; if not in the nature of things, yet in the accidental history of the people among whom it has sprung up. Many of the broad moral distinctions which evangelical Christians make between amusements which are very much alike, receive an easy explanation when we consider the very different *accessories* with which, either in our own days or in former days, they have been associated.

For instance, it is no doubt quite as easy to play at chess for money as to play at whist for money; but people who want the excitement of gambling are impatient of the tedious length to which the one game often extends, and prefer the more rapid movement of the other. The two games are equally games of skill, and require an equal amount, though a different kind, of intellectual effort; but by the one a clever player may win

a good number of sixpences or half-crowns in an evening, while the other is too solemn and slow to be made subordinate to the pecuniary profits of success. Professionals may play for a heavy stake, and heavy bets may be laid on the rival players as the fortunes of the game ebb and flow; but under ordinary circumstances chess is not a convenient disguise for gambling. This is probably the reason that a chess-board may be found in hundreds of houses where the difference between spades and diamonds is quite unknown. There can be no more harm in playing with pieces of coloured pasteboard than with pieces of carved ivory; but cards have been always associated with gambling and chess has not.

Nor is it difficult to explain why bagatelle is allowed and billiards are forbidden. A billiard-table is a large and costly piece of furniture. It needs a room for itself, and a room such as few families belonging to the middle classes have ever

been able to spare for the purpose. It must be treated as tenderly as a new-born infant—kept in an unvarying temperature, if it is to be of any real use. To play at billiards, therefore, people have had to go to a public table, and generally to an hotel. The game has come to be associated with late hours and brandy-and-water. Public playing has brought gambling with it. But bagatelle-boards, sufficiently accurate to afford considerable amusement, are cheap enough to be within the reach of persons of very moderate means; and they have been made of a form and size which render a special room unnecessary. Bagatelle, therefore, has been dissociated from the evils which have given an evil name to billiards; it has made home pleasant; the girls and the boys have played with their father. While the nobler game has lost its reputation from bad company, the inferior game has kept its honour almost stainless.

Again, there are large numbers of good people who look kindly upon the rod and the line, though they regard a man that carries a gun (unless he happens to be an African missionary or a Western settler) as belonging to the devil's regiment. How is this? Has Izaak Walton made all the difference? Would shooting have been as innocent as fishing if its praises had been sung by a spirit as pure and simple as that of the biographer of the saintly George Herbert? Hardly. Perhaps the root of the distinction lies in this — that men commonly go alone to the river and in parties to the stubble. The angler is generally a quiet, meditative man; he is silent, solitary, and gentle; he "handles his worm tenderly;" half his enjoyment lies in penetrating into the secret places of nature, in surprising her shy and hidden beauties, in watching the pleasant wooing which is always going on in shady places in summer time between the murmuring rippling waters and

the ash, the beech, and the willow, which bend to kiss them as they pass. He loves stillness and peace. The country parson may think over his text while his float drifts lazily with the current, or while he wanders by the stream watching for the silver flashes which tempt him to throw his fly. The men that delight to hear the whirr of the partridge are generally of another sort. Anyhow, September brings shooting dinners as well as birds; and with many people heavy drinking is inseparably associated with heavy bags of game. They do not object to eat the partridges when they are shot, but they have the impression that the men who shoot them are a roystering, rollicking set, with whom it is undesirable that their sons should be too intimate. All this is rapidly changing; in many parts of the country it has quite disappeared; but I am inclined to think—speaking of those whom I know best—that though a Nonconformist minister, with a cast of flies on

his hat and a rod on his shoulder, would feel no shyness at meeting accidentally the very gravest of his deacons, he would rather be on the other side of the hedge if he happened to have on his gaiters and to be carrying his gun.

The traditions which have come down to us are explicable; and if we are men of sense we shall ask whether the same circumstances which made certain amusements objectionable a hundred years ago, or fifty years ago, make them objectionable now. I believe in reverence for the deliberate judgments of good men; what they have generally shrunk from and condemned must have had some evil in it. Their spiritual experience, not merely their theoretical opinions, is embodied in the habits of life which they have transmitted to their descendants and followers. But we bring them into contempt if we do not try to understand what it was they really objected to. If they censured particular amusements because of the accessories

with which, in their days, those amusements were associated, and not because of any evil in the amusements themselves, we are actually imperilling their reputation for moral discernment and good sense, by appealing to their authority in condemnation of what is plainly harmless, when the evil accessories have disappeared.

In some instances, the very things which they condemned have changed, and yet their condemnation remains uncancelled. Novel reading may, perhaps, be legitimately considered an amusement. A hundred years ago devout people were, I suppose, almost unanimous in excluding novels from their houses. Nothing, they thought, could be more ruinous to their children than this captivating, ensnaring, and exciting literature. But what kind of novels did they condemn? Would the men who would as soon have seen their girls drinking poison as have seen them reading Mrs. Behn, have

had the same objection to Miss Muloch? Would the traditional veto on works of fiction, which drove some of us when we were boys to read "Ivanhoe" and the "Heart of Mid-Lothian" on the sly, have ever been uttered if George MacDonald had been writing "David Elginbrod" and "Alec Forbes" a hundred and fifty years ago? There are curious corners of English society where the pleasant fact has not yet been discovered that Sir Walter Scott regenerated fiction; and some of the brightest and noblest creations of modern genius are regarded with distrust, on the ground of what was said "by them of old time," about books which every good man would thrust into the fire with disgust at their impurity, or fling into his waste-paper basket with contempt for their frivolity.

We are bound to understand the judgments of our fathers before we appeal to their authority;

and while we should be guilty of presumptuous folly if we did not honour the cautions suggested by the experiences of wise and devout men who have lived before us, we must take care to ask what that experience really was.

Profanity, impurity, and cruelty are always evil, whether connected with our amusements or with the common business and habits of life. Whatever tends to these things is evil too. If any recreation, however pleasant, involves a clear breach of moral laws, it must be bad for all men and under all circumstances. Or if, though harmless in itself, immorality has become inseparably connected with it, every good man will avoid and condemn it.

Prize-fighting, cock-fighting, and bull-baiting are plainly inhuman sports. It is utterly disgusting that men should be able to find any pleasure in them; and the right feeling of English society has

made them all utterly disreputable. As for horse-racing, there can be no intrinsic harm, I suppose, in the magnificent contest for the St. Leger or the Derby; cruelty to the horses is not necessary to the sport. But horse-racing has become a mere pretext for gambling; and if a tithe of what is reported of Doncaster and Epsom during the race-week is to be believed, our "Isthmian games" are disgraced by drunkenness and abominable profligacy. A well-known member of Parliament, a man of the world, making no pretensions to religion, told me, that on being applied to immediately after his election for the usual subscription to the "Members' Plate," he wrote at once to say that in his judgment there was no institution which inflicted greater moral injury on the community than horse-racing, and that sooner than subscribe a single guinea to encourage it he would forfeit his seat. You cannot see the horses run without becoming a party to the gambling, and to the vices worse than

gambling, which races everywhere encourage; if, so long as the sport remains, the wickedness associated with it remain too, no refinements of casuistry are necessary to show that the sport is unlawful.

But there are amusements which cannot be called immoral either in themselves or their accessories, about which a good man will have serious doubts. The object of all recreation is to increase our capacity for work, to keep the blood pure, and the brain bright, and the temper kindly, and sweet. If any recreation exhausts our strength instead of restoring it, or so absorbs our time as to interfere with the graver duties of human life, it must be condemned. How does this principle affect the great English field sport? There are many men to whom hunting is the best possible exercise; one day out of seven after the hounds doubles their energy during the remaining six. Putting aside questions which belong to Economy rather than to

ethics—questions about the injury that hunting inflicts on the land—there seems to be no good reason why such men should not hunt. The horses like the sport; the dogs like it; and as for the fox, he lives such a roguish life that I think he may be sacrificed with an easy conscience for the general good. But if a man must hunt three days a week all through the season, instead of one; if half of his waking life during a great part of the year must be spent on horseback in the field, he is surely forgetting the very object of recreation. Now it is hardly possible to maintain a great hunting establishment, like the famous one at Tedworth, for instance, without making hunting one of the supreme objects of existence; and, with all respect for enthusiasm, whatever grotesque form it may assume, it is rather hard to accept the faith of one of the late Mr. Assheton Smith's dependents, that "the noblest of all occupations is keeping dogs." If any one can hunt a single

day a week, and so keep himself in better condition for his work in the House of Commons, the manufactory, the counting-house, or the study, no one has a right to blame him; but when a man begins to keep hunters, it seems hard to practise moderation. Nor should Richard Baxter's sixteenth test to determine the lawfulness of an amusement be forgotten in connection with this recreation—"Too costly recreation also is unlawful: when you are but God's stewards, and must be accountable to Him for all you have, it is sinful to expend it needlessly on sport."

Amusements are objectionable which interfere with regular and orderly habits of life, and which, instead of increasing health and vigour, produce weariness and exhaustion. What time do young ladies breakfast the day after a ball? How do young gentlemen feel at eight or nine o'clock on Friday morning who were dancing till a couple of hours after midnight on Thursday? Dancing

itself need not be wrong; and the sweeping moral objections to it which have sometimes been urged from the pulpit are unpardonable insults to thousands of women who are as pure-minded as any in the country. There may be some dances which good taste and delicate moral feeling disapprove, but so long as high-minded English ladies find pleasure in the ball-room, no one shall persuade me that the offensive and indiscriminate charges which have been recklessly flung out against dancing have any truth in them. But these charges may be all false and yet there may be very adequate grounds for discouraging balls. It is very pleasant to see a dozen or a score of graceful children, daintily dressed, dancing on a lawn in summer time, or, with the bright red berries and rich green leaves of the holly and the pale-white mistletoe about them, on Twelfth Night. Children were made to dance as birds were made to sing. They sleep sounder for it and wake up

all the fresher the next morning. And if young men and women find themselves getting chilly on a snowy winter's day, or if their spirits are very exuberant, I cannot see why they may not push the tables aside and ask some one to sit down at the piano and play the Lancers. But for people to leave home deliberately at ten o'clock at night, with the intention of dancing for three or four hours, appears to me to be a violation of all the laws and principles which should determine the choice of our pleasures. There is something, too, absolutely grotesque in it. At six o'clock in the evening a grown-up woman goes to her dressing-room, spends three or four hours in arraying herself in gorgeous or beautiful raiment, in clouds of lace or in shining silk; at nine or ten, perhaps at eleven, her carriage comes to the door and she is driven off, it may be through hail or snow or rain, to a room which soon becomes intolerably hot: and there, in the middle of the night, with

four or five score, or four or five hundred people, she spends her time in graceful gymnastics. Gymnastics at midnight! Gymnastics in a crowd! Gymnastics in tarletan! Gymnastics for matrons of five-and-forty and solemn, serious-looking gentlemen of fifty.

But it is not the gymnastics for which the throng assembles. It is for social intercourse. Well, are the conditions and circumstances favourable to social intercourse of a really pleasant and healthy kind? If we must meet our neighbours, is this a rational way of meeting with them? If young gentlemen and young ladies must come to know each other, is a ball-room, with its heat and excitement, and flirtation, the most desirable place for bringing them together? If we were savages still, dancing with each other might probably be the best possible way of spending our time together; but to say that civilized educated people are not able to do something

better than this, is a grim irony on the last and highest results of our national culture.

I have spoken only of balls which are free from obvious moral objection. It is hardly necessary to remind my readers that in all our large commercial and manufacturing towns there are public rooms for dancing, much frequented by assistants in shops, both young men and women, by clerks, by milliners, by girls employed in factories, which have been the moral ruin of thousands.

Perhaps of all amusements, the theatre involves the most intricate and perplexing questions for any one who wishes to do right. That for the last two hundred years there should have been a stern and deep antagonism to dramatic representations among earnestly religious people need excite no surprise. The plays which were acted before Charles II. and the aristocracy of the Restoration, and which retained their popularity for

many a long year after the last of the Stuarts had become an exile, are a sufficient explanation of the horror with which, at least in evangelical families, the stage has been universally regarded.

But it is urged that all plays are not immoral. Dramatic genius—the very highest form of genius, perhaps, belonging to the province of pure literature—need not stain its glory by pandering to the most corrupt passions of corrupt men. Well, let the play be unexceptionable; purify the theatre from all the evil accessories which cling to it in this country and in the great cities of Continental Europe, but from which, if I mistake not, it is perfectly free in the smaller cities in Germany; what shall we say then? Would it still be a sin to laugh at Lord Dundreary? Would it still be a crime to weep over the sorrows of Ophelia? and to be moved more deeply still by the desolation which comes upon the pride and splendour of Wolsey? To sedentary, careworn men, a bril-

liant light comedy is almost as refreshing as a day on Snowdon or Helvellyn; must conscience forbid them the most exhilarating recreation within their reach?

The question is not so simple as it looks. There are people of quick moral sensibility and vigorous good sense, who argue that original dramatic genius is a divine gift, and that dramas, from their very nature, should be seen, not read; that the powers necessary to a great actor are divine gifts too, and that it cannot be wrong to derive enjoyment from witnessing their exercise; that the craving for the kind of excitement which is produced by seeing a good play well acted is as natural, and therefore as innocent, as hunger and thirst; that for good people to condemn amusements which satisfy a universal and harmless instinct, is to engage in a perilous contest with the very constitution of human nature, and must issue in most lamentable results; that the accidental evils

now connected with the theatre would never have existed, or would long ago have disappeared, had religious people not given up all control of the stage, so that their alleged mistake has actually created, or at least perpetuated, all that is morally perilous in the actual condition of the institution; that the real alternative presented to the practical wisdom of those who are anxious to promote the morality of the community, is not, whether theatrical representations shall continue to exist or not —for while men continue to be what God made them, the passion for the drama will be inextinguishable—but whether theatrical representations shall be separated and cleansed from the associations which now make the theatre the haunt of vice and the very centre of all the corruption that curses and disgraces great cities.

But, after all, we have to take things as they stand. It is not our duty to send our sons and daughters into a region of moral evil, with the

hope that in the course of a generation or two their presence will cause the evil to disappear. For themselves, indeed, there may be no serious danger. Our presence with them may shield them from all contact with what would harm them. They may be as safe in their box from the men and women, from whose lightest touch we should wish them to recoil, as when they are in our own drawing-rooms. But if they go, hundreds and thousands more will go who have no parental shelter, and whose purse keeps them in the gallery or the pit. Are those young men and women exposed to no perils? Moreover, if report does not greatly deceive me, there are still plays acted on the English stage whose moral tendencies can hardly be approved by a sensitive conscience. Such plays, it is alleged, would disappear if the better class of society attended the theatre in large numbers. Perhaps they would; meanwhile, I do not choose to recommend my friends to sit down to a table

where they are likely to find poisoned dishes, with the hope that by-and-by their influence will lead to the production of better fare.

There is another consideration which appears to deserve great weight, though it would take too much space fully to develop it. How does it happen that actors and actresses have so often been persons of questionable character? I am infinitely far from thinking that there have not been, that there are not now, men and women on the stage of whom it would be an atrocious slander to whisper or to insinuate an injurious suspicion. Not merely the distinguished names of Kemble, Macready, Young, Siddons, Faucit, refute the libels which are sometimes uttered against their profession; there are many less illustrious instances of honour unstained and virtue untainted by the perils and excitements which beset the actor's life. But are not those perils very serious and grave? They may defy analysis, but do they not exist?

Should we honour with such warmth of admiration those who do not fall, if experience had not proved how hard it is to stand? We do injustice to those whose lives are blameless, if we think that their blamelessness is no proof of exceptional moral strength. Now, if any amusement involves grave moral danger to those who provide it, a good man will shrink from it; just as a gentle, kindly man shrinks from witnessing feats of skill which imperil the lives or the limbs of the performers.

What the theatre may be in the next century, or the century after that, we cannot tell. It is hard to think that the genius of great dramatists will disappear when the moral condition of society shall have been regenerated by the influence of the Christian faith, or that the noble physical gifts and intellectual susceptibilities of great actors will then have a place only in the history of the darker times of the human race. It may then be found

that a profession which appears to be singularly perilous to those who enter it, has been perilous only from the circumstances with which it has been accidentally connected, and that the neighbourhood of a theatre may be as decent and respectable as the neighbourhood of a church. Meanwhile, it is at least safer to deny ourselves the pleasant excitement which the stage, and the stage alone, can give, rather than incur the responsibility of encouraging the evils which have so long been associated with its fascinations.

I have discussed the questions raised in this paper solely on moral grounds; and I have done this intentionally. The common reason alleged for condemning certain amusements in which no moral evil can be shown to exist, is that they are "worldly." But there is no word in our language which is more abused than this. The sin of worldliness is a very grave one; but thousands and tens of thousands of people are guilty of it, who

are most vigorous in maintaining the narrowest traditions they have received from their fathers. One would imagine, from the habits of speech common in some sections of religious society, that worldliness has to do only with our pleasures, while in truth it has to do with the whole spirit and temper of our life. To be "worldly" is to permit the higher laws to which we owe allegiance, the glories and terrors of that invisible universe which is revealed to faith, our transcendent relations to the Father of spirits through Christ Jesus our Lord, to be overborne by inferior interests, and by the opinions and practices of those in whom the life of God does not dwell. There is a worldliness of the counting-house as fatal to the true health and energy of the soul as the worldliness of the ball-room; and there are more people whose loyalty to Christ is ruined by covetousness than by love of pleasure. There is a worldliness in the conduct of ecclesiastical affairs quite as

likely to extinguish the divine fire which should burn in the church, as the worldliness which reveals itself in the frivolity of those unhappy people whose existence is spent in one ceaseless round of gaiety. There is a worldliness in politics —an oblivion of what God has revealed concerning the brotherhood of mankind, and the social and national duties which arise from the common relationship of all men and all nations to Him—quite as hostile to the manifestation of the Kingdom of Heaven in human society, as the worldliness which openly defies the real or conventional distinctions which churches have drawn between lawful and forbidden amusements. Let no man think that he ceases to be worldly—ceases, that is, to belong to that darker and inferior region of life from which Christ came to deliver us—merely by abstaining from half a dozen of his old recreations. Not thus easily is the great victory won which is possible only to a vigorous and

invincible Faith. Not thus artificial are the boundaries between the heavenly commonwealth, of which the spiritual man is a citizen, and the kingdom of evil from which he has escaped.

But let it be granted that certain amusements are really "worldly," and it is still important to remind sincerely religious persons that they have no right to condemn as morally wrong, amusements which are simply distasteful to the higher instincts of their own nature; nor must they translate into moral precepts, for the guidance of their families and dependants, the higher laws of their spiritual life. A very devout man will find himself ill at ease in many circumstances in which the purest and most upright of his friends, who is destitute of religious earnestness, will be conscious of no discomfort. Excitements and pleasures may be morally harmless, and may yet be discovered by experience to be unfavourable to spiritual "recollections" and unbroken communion with God.

Saintly men do not impose as duties on others the exercises which they know are essential to the intensity and depth of their own devotional life; nor should they impose as a duty on others abstinence from certain pleasures which have become distasteful to their own spiritual instincts, or which spiritual prudence leads them to avoid. Let it be granted that a man who is trying to be earnestly religious will shrink from some of the amusements in which no one can discover any moral evil, does it follow that he is at liberty to require his children to avoid these amusements too? By no means. He rightly thinks it to be his own duty to spend a couple of hours every morning in reading the Holy Scriptures and meditating on the glory of God, but he does not insist upon all his children doing the same. He knows that the protracted religious solitude which to him, with his religious intensity, is blessedness and strength, would be to them an injurious formality.

Can he not see that the very same principle should restrain him from enforcing on them abstinence from pleasures which, not his moral sense, but the sympathies and exigencies of his spiritual life alone, have led him to renounce?

It does not follow that those who desire to lead a devout life should disregard the wisdom which has come from the experience of past generations, and avoid no pleasures from which their own spiritual taste does not lead them to shrink, impose upon themselves no discipline, the uses of which they have not personally verified. There is no doubt a true spiritual philosophy underlying the advice which I am told is sometimes given by a very spiritual man to his friends—"Become Christians first, and then consider what your habits and amusements should be;" but like all broad statements of great principles, it requires to be taken with some limitations.

If a man who had become religiously earnest happened to be in a position which was morally indefensible—if he were the manager, for instance, of a Joint-Stock Company which was being cunningly worked for the profit of its promoters, but to the certain ruin of innocent shareholders—it might be perfectly right, *in a certain sense*, to say to him—Trust to the Divine Mercy revealed through our Lord Jesus Christ for the pardon of sin and the gift of a new and higher life, and then think what changes you must make in your business affairs, if you are to be loyal to Christ's authority. And yet it is very certain that his religious life would be extinguished if he did not at once become an honest man. The moral conditions under which he would be living so long as he remained a rogue, would be absolutely fatal to religious sincerity and earnestness.

Now it is only a just deference to the experience of those who have tried, before ourselves, to live in

God, to believe that there are certain conditions under which this is impossible, and that there is such a thing as "worldliness," the evil of which may not be discerned while the religious life has not passed beyond its inferior and elementary developments, but which will certainly prevent its reaching perfect strength and beauty. It is perilous to adopt a "rule" which is far beyond us. But it appears to be the simplest and most obvious dictate of practical wisdom, to take some things on trust for a time, and always to set the line over which we will not pass a little farther than our spiritual instincts at the moment actually require. This seems to be the natural condition of growth.

Incomplete as this discussion of a very wide subject must necessarily be, it would be unpardonably defective if I did not, in closing, remind my readers that our Lord's precept, "Judge not,"

has peculiar authority in relation to such questions as have been treated in this paper. There are amusements which are ruinous to some people, which others can enjoy without danger. When the infallible guidance of great moral laws fails us, and we have to trust to the suggestions of expediency, we should be very cautious how we condemn the habits of our neighbours. That may be safe to them which is perilous to us. If it is not intrinsically wrong, we have no right to censure them. It may be a sin to me to eat roast veal, because it injures my health and unfits me for duty; but all men are not to avoid the luscious dish because one man suffers from it. Are the weak always to give laws to the strong? Must Professor Tyndall never ascend Monte Rosa because my head is weak and my footing uncertain? No doubt the strong will sometimes avoid what they know to be lawful for themselves, that their weaker brethren may not be betrayed into

sin; but there are limits to this self-abnegation. Weakness is a bad thing; and if a constant homage to it tends to make me and others weak too, I may think it right, for the sake of my own moral vigour, and for the sake of the moral vigour of those who are in danger of becoming morbidly scrupulous, to live the bolder and freer life, which my own conscience approves. The sick-room is good for the sick man, but it will make the strong man sick if he always lives there. Habits of caution, in which some men find safety, may be to other men, of a different temperament and character, positively injurious.

We must learn, especially in a time like this, to trust each other. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?" It is possible that what I condemn in my brother's life may be as wrong to him as it would be to me; but it is also possible that in condemning him for "worldliness" I may be violating the royal law of charity.

XI.

SUMMER HOLIDAYS.

IT was not left to this restless and fevered century to discover the healthy and purifying influence of loneliness and rest. When the Apostles returned to Christ, excited and weary, after their first great evangelistic journey, "He took them and went aside privately into a desert place;" and after Elijah's tragic and stormy conflict with the priests of Baal, the prophet went away into the wilderness, and spent six weeks among the solitudes of Horeb.

The physical benefits which come from a month among the mountains or by the sea, are obvious;

but summer holidays may have other uses which, perhaps, are not so often thought of. Apart altogether from any direct intention to employ the pleasant leisure for the highest ends, most men are the better for it. A precocious child, after reading the inscriptions in a churchyard, which recorded the incomparable virtues of the dead lying beneath, wondered where they buried all the bad people; and I have often wondered, when away from home, where the ill-tempered and irritable people go for their holiday. How genial every one seems to be on a Rhine steamer! Who was ever known to be out of temper on Loch Katrine? Meet a man at the Furca, and walk with him to the Grimsel, and you are sure to find him one of the most kindly of the human race. Share a carriage to Inverary with people you chance to meet at Oban, and you think it would be charming to travel with them for a month. Extortionate bills and rainy weather may ruffle

the temper for a moment, but so far as I have observed, if a "tourist ticket" is ever issued to a cantankerous man (of which I have serious doubts), he no sooner gets it into his waistcoat-pocket than it acts like a charm. If we could only keep some of our acquaintances always on the top of a Highland coach, or crossing Swiss passes, or climbing Welsh hills, what a happy thing it would be for *them*—and for us! No theological reading does them half as much good as "Murray" or "Baedecker," and a volume of "Black" is more useful to them than a score of sermons.

From the very beginning of the world man needed rest, as much for his intellect and heart as for his body. Among the Jews the weekly Sabbath was literally a weekly rest, in commemoration of the rest of God after the creation of the world. In the fourth commandment there is

nothing about worship either public or private, and the keeping holy of the Sabbath day consisted originally in mere absence from work. No doubt part of the day was always spent by devout men in meditation on the greatness of Jehovah and on the wonderful history and glorious hopes of the descendants of Abraham; and part of it in talking to children about the dark times in Egypt, and about the giving of the law, and about famous warriors and prophets, "of whom the world was not worthy;" but till synagogues were established in every part of the country after the captivity, there were no regular weekly assemblies for listening to the reading and exposition of the Scriptures and for uniting in common prayer. When the people were rebuked for breaking the fourth commandment, they were rebuked not because they kept away from "church," but because they did their ordinary work on the Sabbath of the Lord. The moral uses of the day were

largely secured by keeping it simply as a day of rest.

Among ourselves, week by week, a nobler event is commemorated, and commemorated in a nobler way. The Jewish Sabbath celebrated the final victory of the Divine wisdom and power over the ancient chaos, and the Divine joy over the perfected beauty and order of the material world; the Christian Sunday celebrates the commencement of the great struggle of the risen Christ with the evil and misery of the human race. The Jewish Sabbath was the last day of the week, and was a rest from past work; the Christian Sunday is the first day of the week, and is a rest in anticipation of coming toil. The one looked back to the consummation of accomplished labours; the other looks forward and gives strength for labours yet to come. But the instinct of the Church in fencing the Sunday from common work and common care is true and just. The day should be,

as far as possible, a day of quietness and peace. Attendance on public worship, though the chief duty of the Sunday, is not its sole use; and when the excitement and labour of the week are continued, though in a different form, on the day of rest, some of its most precious benefits are altogether missed.

Years ago I remember hearing an excellent minister, not distinguished for intellectual vigour, pray on Sunday morning that on that day his congregation might have "intellectual repose." I mockingly thought that, so far as the good man's own sermons were concerned, there was no danger of the repose being disturbed, and that it would have been better if he had prayed for intellectual activity. I have grown wiser since then, and have come to believe that what many men really want on Sunday, if the Sunday is to make them better and stronger for the week, is for the brain and heart to have rest. For the

young, the strong, and the speculative, preaching cannot have too much of vigorous and stimulating thought in it; but there are many weary, sorrowful people to whom a preacher renders the most efficient service by causing them to "lie down in green pastures," and leading them "beside the still waters." Perhaps the power to win the thoughts of the anxious away from their troubles, and to soothe the irritated and the fretful, is quite as rare as the power of strenuous argument or vehement appeal.

Our summer holidays, like our Sundays, should give us rest. The month away from home should be the Sabbatic month of the year. The hurrying, eager, unquiet way in which many people spend their holiday, the passion to see everything that is praised in the Guide-book, and to "do" everything that ought to be "done," the long weary journeys in close railway carriages, the evenings in crowded coffee-rooms, are very remote from

that ideal peace and tranquillity which most of us need quite as much as change of scene and physical exercise. In our common life "the world is too much with us." Wisdom

> "Oft seeks to sweet retired solitude,
> Where, with her best nurse, Contemplation,
> She plumes her feathers, and lets grow her wings,
> That, in the various bustle of resort,
> Were all too-ruffled, and sometimes impaired."

But what do most of us, in these times, know of solitude? How many hours have we in the week for "contemplation?" The "wings" of our souls are not only "ruffled" and "impaired," they are almost useless, and refuse their proper functions. Our intellectual faculties and our spiritual affections both suffer from the incessant turmoil and anxiety in which we are obliged to live; and both the intellect and the heart might be, and ought to be, the better for the quiet days which are within our reach when the summer and autumn come.

Not that I think it would be at all a profitable way of spending a holiday to determine to master the elements of a new science, or to devote three or four hours every day to the declensions, conjugations, and vocabulary of a new language. But every man who was a student in his youth is conscious, I suppose, of the difficulty, when the strain of active life is fully upon him, of securing time for that deliberate and thoughtful reading of a great book, which often constitutes an epoch in the history of our intellectual development. The fragmentary and interrupted reading, which is all that is possible to nine men out of ten when they are at home, does very little for them; and the more serious and vigorous studies, which a few men attempt to carry on when their brains are wearied with the work of the day, are not much more fruitful. There are fastidious books, which ask for a mind perfectly fresh, and sensitive to every subtlety of thought and every grace of

expression; there are jealous books, which are impatient of every rival, and reject our homage altogether if we cannot bring them an undivided soul. It is useless for a physician to try to read "Comus" in his carriage, or for a clerk in the City to take "In Memoriam" with him on the top of an omnibus. De Tocqueville's "Democracy in America" might as well not be read at all as read at night, with a mind continually turning aside to the day's vexations and annoyances. But let any one of these books be put into the portmanteau when starting for Scotland or the Lakes, and, if there must be lighter reading too, one of Sir Walter Scott's best novels, or one of George Macdonald's; and, if the traveller knows how to read, he will return home not only with vivid memories of rugged mountains and peaceful waters, but conscious that his whole intellectual life has been wonderfully quickened and stimulated. He has travelled with Milton, with Tennyson, or with

the profoundest of political philosophers, and, in his lighter moods, has listened to the wisest and most charming of modern story-tellers. We cannot, when we are at home, live with a book for a whole month—we can do it when we are away; and what took a great author months or years to write, can hardly reveal to common men all its wisdom and all its beauty in a hasty reading which is over in a few hours.

There is, however, a still higher use to which a month's holiday may be well applied: we may play the part of Socrates to our own minds. Since the beginning of the sixteenth century, I suppose there was never a time when the intellect of Europe was agitated by so many fierce and conflicting influences as at the present moment, and there has certainly never been a time since then when men of active intelligence were so likely to be swept away by currents of speculation, without

knowing either their original source or their direction and ultimate issue. Our popular literature is penetrated through and through with the principles of hostile philosophies and creeds. Mill and Hamilton, Comte and Hegel, the gross materialism of the *enfants perdus* of Positivism, and a vague dreamy spiritualism—you come across them all, under the strangest disguises and in most unexpected places.

A keen, clever man, without much time for systematic thought, is struck with an article in the columns of a newspaper or the pages of a review; he thinks over it at odd moments, talks about it at a friend's dinner-table, and gradually makes it his own. He does not inquire on what ultimate theory of the universe the speculations which have fascinated him must rest, or with what parts of that system of truth which seems to him most certain they are altogether irreconcilable. He is charmed by the beauty or ingenuity

or grandeur of the new ideas, or they seem to solve difficulties which have troubled him, or to afford useful and available aids to an upright and noble life; and therefore, without inquiring where they came from and what kind of a "character" they bear, and whether they have disreputable and vicious connections, he receives them at once. They have a pleasant look, a gracious manner, a musical voice, a dignified bearing, and he never dreams of suspecting them. But, once securely lodged, they soon gather their friends and confederates about them; the whole clan gradually assembles. The man finds that somehow—he does not know how—his whole way of looking at the world has been changed, or else he is living in a new universe. The "everlasting hills" themselves, with whose majestic outlines he was so familiar, have melted away, and the old constellations have vanished from the sky. The change may be for the better; perhaps he has

parted only with delusions, and has risen into the region of realities: but such vast revolutions ought not to be the work of accident and chance.

Would it not be well for those who are conscious that they are intellectually alive, and that they are powerfully influenced by the speculations and controversies by which they are surrounded, to try and find out, during their summer holidays, to what quarter of the troubled ocean of human thought they are drifting? They resolutely believe, as yet, in the eternal and infinite difference between right and wrong: are they insensibly yielding to a philosophy in which that difference virtually disappears? They think that nothing could persuade them to abandon their faith in moral responsibility, and to contradict the clear testimony of consciousness to the freedom of the will: are they sure that the silent but inevitable development of theories by which they have been greatly charmed, will not necessitate the denial of

both? Is their faith in a personal God quite safe? If the ideas which have come to us from books, from conversation, from sermons, from solitary meditation, are all true, they will be the better for being thoroughly organized, and considered in their mutual relations, their original grounds, and their final results. If they are false, if they are destructive of truths and laws to which our own consciousness and the history of the human race bear irresistible witness, the sooner they are expelled from the mind the safer for ourselves and for all with whom we have anything to do.

The highest end of all to which protracted leisure can be applied remains to be illustrated. For a month, for six weeks, we cease to be merchants or lawyers, manufacturers or tradesmen, preachers or physicians, and become men. We cast off the occupations and cares which limit and restrain the free action of our nature through the greater part

of the year, and may, if we please, rise beyond the control of "things seen and temporal," and live for a time in untroubled and uninterrupted fellowship with "things unseen and eternal." Our summer holiday, or part of it, may be a kind of "spiritual retreat."

There are many people, no doubt, who only become more restless when they are obliged to be still. They cannot escape from their counting-houses, their banks, their conflicts with trades' unions, their legal troubles, except by violent physical exertion or the strongest stimulant which they can get from travel in strange countries and sight-seeing in strange cities. Unless they are climbing mountains or grinding over glaciers, or stirred by the pleasant excitements which come from listening to a foreign tongue and watching the unfamiliar manners of a foreign people, they might as well be at home. Every man must judge for himself, and find out how he can best get his brain quiet and run the

whole current of his thoughts out of its accustomed channel. But even those persons who would not be able to shake themselves free from their common cares, if they spent all their holiday in a quiet country inn, among the elms and oaks and corn-fields of their own country, or in a lone farm-house among the silent hills, might be able to devote a few days or a week to tranquil religious thought, when they have fairly got away from the steam and the stir and the tumult which followed them till they were five hundred miles distant from home.

It is to be feared that some Christian men return to their ordinary life with less devoutness and spiritual intensity than when they left it. While they were away, public worship was not regularly attended, private prayer was offered hurriedly, and Holy Scripture was read carelessly or not at all. Their temper is better, and they are more kindly and generous, from the brief interruption of common

duties; but their vision of God is none the clearer. They have not escaped from the entanglements which, even in their devoutest moments, keep them among the lowest ranks of the hierarchy of worshippers around the eternal throne.

And yet, when they are hurried and pressed by the incessant claims of their profession or trade, they often sigh for days of solitary thought and unbroken communion with Christ. They sometimes think that if they could only contemplate more steadily and continuously the august and majestic realities of the invisible world, they might be able to live a nobler and more saintly life. They feel that "the mighty hopes that make us men" must be firmly grasped by sustained and undistracted thought, if they are to have power to subdue the inferior but vehement excitements by which day after day they are swept helplessly along. But they have no time or strength or stillness for lofty meditation. They wish they had. They envy the

people who have more quietness and leisure, and, conscious of the difficulty of mastering the world while engaged in its conflicts and surrounded with its tumult, half suspect that ideal saintliness is possible only in monastic seclusion.

Why do not such men spend a few of the bright calm hours of their yearly rest in that prolonged spiritual meditation and in those acts of more intense devotion, in which they cannot engage at other times? Their feet are free to wander now along the remoter and less familiar paths of religious thought. The noise of the distant world of care and toil is hushed, and they may listen to the voice of God. They have time for the steadfast contemplation of the burning splendours of the divine nature, and may catch the fervour and inspiration of cherubim and seraphim, who have nearest access to the infinite glory. They may invite by patient expectation, and by the penitent and humble confession of weakness, the baptism of the Holy Spirit

and of fire. They may anticipate the final judgment. They may see afar off the palaces of heaven, and the nations of the saved walking in white raiment and crowned with immortal honour and blessedness. They may find that even here, there is "fulness of joy" in the presence of God, and that the light of His countenance can surround the devout soul with celestial glory.

No Christian man need find it difficult to make this lofty use of summer leisure. It is not the faculty for creating striking and original lines of thought that is necessary. We may all "wait upon God;" and it is by *waiting* on Him, not by elaborating grand and splendid conceptions of Him, that we "renew" our "strength." If spiritual impulse and power were derived from the reflex action on the heart, of our own intellectual activity in the regions of divine truth, the measure of our religious earnestness would be determined by the vigour and brilliance of our intellectual faculties,

and persons unexercised in abstract thought would be placed at a grievous disadvantage. But the simplest truths, when they lead us direct to God, answer all the practical purposes of the most profound thoughts of theologians. A single parable of our Lord's, a well-known promise of mercy and strength, any one of the divine attributes considered in its most obvious aspects and revelations, is enough to open our whole nature to the tides of divine life and joy. The cry of the heart after God will surely be answered; and, allowing for rare and abnormal conditions of the spiritual nature, the Christian man who longs to live and move and have his being in God, has only to separate himself for a time from the agitations and pursuits of his secular life, and he will find himself surrounded with the innumerable company of angels and in the very presence of the Highest.

Would not the pleasure as well as the lasting

profit of a summer holiday be almost infinitely augmented, if part of it at least were set apart and consecrated to this tranquil yet intense contemplation of God and of the heaven where God dwells? There are some men, I am told, who, when they come home after a month's absence, seem to have forgotten everything about it except the bills they have paid, the dinners they have eaten, the wines they have drunk, and, if they have been abroad, the strange customs of the countries they have visited. There are others whose memory is enriched for all coming years. They can recall the stateliness and majesty of ancient cathedrals, the splendour of imperial palaces, the look of streets and houses which have become famous in the history of Europe, the awful grandeur and chaotic waste of mountains they have climbed, the dazzling glory of wonderful sunsets, the changing lights which have made river or lake look like a dream of fairy-land. Happier still are those who in addition to such

memories as these, can recall how in mountain solitudes it seemed as if the heavens opened and they talked to God face to face; or how when alone by the sea-shore, mists and clouds which had surrounded them for years suddenly broke and melted away, and the divine goodness or the divine justice stood visibly revealed. Pleasant glens and lonely paths among the hills will henceforth have everlasting associations, and will be vividly recalled when the solid earth has melted with fervent heat; for when eternity comes we shall remember most distinctly and most gratefully, not the places where we accumulated our wealth or won our transient social triumphs, but those where we resolved to live a holier life and received strength to do it.

Used wisely and earnestly, every successive summer holiday might leave us with larger and nobler thoughts of God, with a loftier ideal of character, with every devout affection more fervent, and every right purpose invigorated and confirmed. If to

secure such results as these it is necessary to keep within the four seas instead of rushing hurriedly over Germany, Switzerland, and France, if it is necessary for those who are taking their holiday in England to leave some famous places in the neighbourhood unseen and some customary excursions unaccomplished, will not the sacrifice receive abounding compensation ?

XII.

CHRISTMAS PARTIES.

YEAR after year, in one generation after another, through century after century, Christian hearts in every land seem to hear once more the song of the angels who announced to the shepherds of Bethlehem the birth of our Lord. The celestial chorus is caught up by new nations, sung on new shores, and in strange tongues:—

> "Like circles widening round,
> Upon a clear blue river;
> Orb after orb,—the wond'rous sound
> Is echoed on for ever:
> Glory to God on high, on earth be peace
> And love towards men of love, salvation and release."

Here in England we all keep Christmas—Romanists and Protestants, Churchmen and Dissenters, Wesleyans and Baptists. I have a strong suspicion that even the members of the Society of Friends eat roast-beef and set fire to their plum-puddings on the twenty-fifth of December. The pleasant season brings joy to all sorts and conditions of men; to rich and poor; to old and young; to boys and girls, who have just escaped from Greek paradigms and Czerny's exercises; and to tired men of business, who hardly get another holiday all the year through. The workhouse, the lunatic asylum, and the prison are bright with the red berries and rich dark green of the holly, and savoury with the steam of sumptuous fare.

There are some people who are not quite sure whether this feasting and gaiety are altogether right and Christian. Perhaps they are not the more likely to spend Christmas quietly because of their scruples; but they go to the houses of their

friends and receive their friends at their own table, with a secret discomfort, of which they are only just conscious themselves, and which they never think of acknowledging to others. If any man suspects that his religious life is injured by Christmas entertainments, he should give them up altogether. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." *I* think that, so far from their being "unspiritual" and "worldly," these meetings of relatives and friends are among the most legitimate sources of recreation and happiness; that a pleasant dinner, cheerful conversation, a Christmas Carol and an old English Madrigal, are far less likely to make a man selfish and irreligious, than a day behind the counter or on the Exchange. But whoever thinks otherwise should be careful not to outrage his moral convictions. Whatever else is right or wrong, a weak yielding to common customs, with an uneasy suspicion that they are not quite innocent, must be mischievous. The people to whom Christmas does most injury—

I say nothing of those who are guilty of gluttony and excess—are those who comply with the usual habits of society, and are doubtful, all the time, whether these habits are consistent with the grave earnestness which should distinguish the Christian character.

But most of my readers are free from scruples of this kind, and entertain their friends with a clear and healthy conviction that they are not on doubtful or perilous ground. There are some follies and sins, however, committed at Christmas-time, which every good man will wish to avoid.

One of the worst is the folly and sin of *ostentation*. People belonging to every class of society may be guilty of it. A duke may be ostentatious as well as a rising manufacturer; a clerk living in a house, for which he pays twenty pounds a year, as well as a successful tradesman who has spent three or four thousand pounds in building and furnishing

his new villa. The desire of making a show, of pretending to unreal wealth, or displaying wealth which has been honestly won, the folly of assuming the manners and habits which mark a social rank higher than our own, vanity in one form or another, is a sin which all sorts of men may commit, and a sin to which this time of the year brings many and strong temptations.

By giving an ostentatious entertainment you do not deal fairly with your guests. It is supposed that you invite them to your house to give pleasure to *them*—not to display your own grandeur. They come to be entertained, not to be dazzled, oppressed, and humbled by your magnificence. The happiest and merriest parties on Christmas Day are at those houses where the dinner is not very much better than that which is served at other times, and where the host and hostess have no anxiety lest any special and unusual arrangements should break down. There are really very few

inflictions more irritating than to have to sit at table, with the consciousness that the master of the house and the mistress are too much occupied with thinking about how their entertainment is to be safely carried through, to enjoy it themselves, or to have much thought about the enjoyment of their friends. Their nervousness is infectious. You expect every moment some unfortunate accident; you feel that their temper is being chafed by one mistake and mishap after another, and you wonder what will happen next. If they had only tried to do half as much they would have given twice the pleasure.

This ostentation is a sin as well as a folly. It is one of the signs and results of that restlessness and petty ambition which is sure to be driven out of the soul by habitual communion with God, and a vivid faith in things unseen. It belongs to the very essence of what the New Testament writers call "worldliness." It is inconsistent with sim-

plicity of heart, with humility, with thorough sincerity. It is the effect of a bad moral condition, and, if indulged in, will be the cause of further deterioration. It is a thing not to be laughed at merely, but to be repented of, confessed, and forsaken.

Closely connected with the sin of ostentation is the sin of *extravagance.* It is perfectly right for a man with a good income to entertain his friends bountifully. It is an expression of his kindliness, and is intended to promote their enjoyment. The ointment which might have been sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor was not wasted, for it was consecrated to the highest use; it expressed the homage of Mary's heart for her Lord. Many a dinner which is given on Christmas Day to a dozen people costs as much as good wholesome food that would satisfy the appetite of a hundred hungry men; but I am not disposed to find fault. If it be a duty to care for the poor, it is a

duty also to give happiness to our children and friends.

But it is possible to lavish money in ways that bring no enjoyment—to double the expense of a dinner party with no corresponding increase of its pleasantness; and this is mere extravagance and waste.

Extravagance is specially blamable—it becomes a positive crime—when men are doubtful whether the luxuries on their table will not have to be paid for with other people's money.

"It's of no use saving cheese-parings; the difference between ten pounds and twenty, for a dinner party, can make no difference to my creditors if a crash must come; we may as well be happy as long as we can." This is how some people reason at Christmas time, and very miserable reasoning it is. They will find, if they fail, that however much pity they may win for unfortunate speculations, very small extravagances will provoke

great bitterness. They may be pardoned for want of caution in their business; they will be mercilessly condemned for luxurious self-indulgence at their table. The instinctive indignation against an extravagant bankrupt is sound and healthy; by his want of judgment, or by the misfortunes which brought great losses, he suffered himself more heavily than any one else; by the extravagance, which, perhaps, can make no appreciable difference in his balance-sheet and dividend, his creditors are the only sufferers.

There should be some proportion between the cost of our entertainments and the amount we give away, as well as between the cost of our entertainments and the amount of our income. Not a few people who "profess and call themselves Christians," spend as much on their Christmas parties as they have contributed all the year through, for the relief of human suffering, the instruction of the ignorant, and the diffusion of the Gospel. Fifteen

pounds for a single dinner, and one guinea a year for foreign missions; wine on your table at seventy shillings a dozen, and half a sovereign against your name in the list of contributions to a hospital; twenty people feeding at your table on Christmas Day, and no poor children better taught or better clothed through your charity; your health drunk in champagne or sparkling hock, and no blessings invoked on your head by the orphan or the widow;—these things are not very consistent with the profession that Christ is the example of holy living as well as the sacrifice for sin. Men strain their resources to give their friends a pleasant evening, and are wonderfully cautious when their benevolence is appealed to. It is a curious question, how it is that bad times have so much effect on charitable gifts, and so slight an effect on Christmas dinners. If men can afford to give so little away, they cannot afford to treat their guests so lavishly.

It is worth while, too, to consider how much

mischief expensive entertainments may inflict upon your friends. The people you invite to your table think that they must give you as good as you give them,—they do not like to be outdone. The style of your hospitality determines theirs. Expenses which you can hardly afford, some of them may find it still harder to bear; or, at least, what is out of proportion to your income and to your charity, will be still more out of proportion to theirs.

It is one of the duties which we owe to society in these days to avoid all complicity with the perilous folly of constantly augmenting the cost of living. The grotesque doctrine that it is good for trade, and promotes the wealth of the country, to eat and drink as much as we can, to wear fine clothes and lay down costly carpets, is an error which it belongs to the political economist to refute. No one will ever advance it as an apology for extravagance who wishes to have credit for even the most elementary acquaintance with economical science.

To deny the law of gravitation, or to maintain that the earth is the centre of the solar system, is not a plainer proof of ignorance than to affirm that we increase the riches of the community by consuming them. But the moral influence of these habits is worse than the economical. "Plain living and high thinking,"—this is what, in these times, every man who respects the dignity of his nature ought to care for.

"High thinking:" there is not much of this at Christmas parties, but might not the talk be a little less weak and worthless? How to get twenty people to spend an evening together pleasantly is a sore difficulty with many good Christians. Conversation is not an art in which we English excel; our very language, when compared with that of our neighbours across the Channel, is a sign of our inferiority. Men that speak well in public are often incapable of conversing with any ease. Men with large information are often unable to convey it to

others except in a formal lecture, and we have no desire to listen to lectures when we meet our friends. Just as many of us, with our stiff limbs and unequally developed muscles, are incapable of the free exercises of the gymnasium, many of us are incapable of that relaxation and play of mind which are the charm of conversation. "The flow of soul" is what the middle-class Englishman knows very little about; our "souls" are more like sluggish canals than sparkling trout-streams. Medical students and solicitors under forty can talk. Here and there a clever, well-read woman can fill a room with pleasant music, talking herself and making other people talk too. But a party of well-to-do English people is generally rather a dreary affair. Scotchmen are keen at logic, Irishmen are good at fun, but Englishmen of the prosperous respectable class are seldom lively. Coleridge, indeed, said that he found more serious and intelligent conversation among tradesmen and manufacturers than among professed

literary men. But Coleridge is hardly an authority on this subject. What he wanted was good listeners; he preferred having all the talking to himself; and I can quite believe that cultivated and thoughtful men of business were more inclined to listen to him patiently than men whose constant occupation was to think and write, and who, therefore, required in society rest rather than instruction. Anyhow, there are few parts of this country in which people do not complain that very sensible and well-informed men are miserably helpless in conversation.

It would not be difficult to anticipate nine-tenths of the talk which is likely to be heard at most of the dinner-tables of my English readers next Christmas. The best and most refreshing of all, perhaps, will be among brothers and sisters and old schoolmates, who will talk of the years which are fast drifting out of sight and out of memory—of boyish pranks and girlish vanities—of old schoolmasters and old games—of the successes and failures of those

whose lives began together, but who are now scattered through remote lands, and separated still more widely by differences of creed, of character, and of fortune; sad thoughts and happy thoughts will mingle pathetically in the review, some having done so well who it was feared would do so ill, some having gone so grievously wrong with whom life began so brightly: the solemn memory of the dead will check the light-heartedness of the living. Young mothers will talk of their babies, maidens will be "chaffed" about their absent lovers, the prosperous uncle will be congratulated on his horses, and will tell in return how many pounds of grapes he has got off his favourite vine. Then there will be the price of meat, and the fluctuations of Railway Stock, and Lord Derby's prospects, and Mr. Bright's alleged violence, and the embroidered dresses and sweet perfumes which have filled all the nursemaids with admiration in some neighbouring Ritualistic church.

Of religious conversation, properly so called, there will be very little. There is an impression, indeed, among those who know very little of evangelical Christians, that, whenever we spend an evening together, the Bible is brought out as soon as coffee has been served, and that the rest of the time is spent in reading an epistle and in prayer. Not long ago a very intelligent and excellent friend of mine was telling me that in his judgment this practice, which he supposed was universal, both among evangelical Churchmen and evangelical Nonconformists, was one of the injurious results of an exaggerated pietism. I was obliged to tell him that, so far as I knew, evenings of this kind were very rare. To inquire how it is that free talk about religion has become so unfrequent among us, might suggest lines of thought which would carry us into the very heart of some of the most important questions in relation to the religious life of modern evangelical Christians, and the history out of which it has sprung.

For my part, I decline to accept the common excuse, that religion is too sacred a thing to be spoken of. I do not think that we have any deeper sense of the sacredness of divine things than our fathers had, many of whom were quite unconscious of the difficulty which closes our mouths and condemns us to silence, on subjects which we profess to believe are of the greatest importance to us. Our sense of their sacredness is not at all deeper than that of Continental Christians, whose religious conversation is generally very frank and easy. As a rule, it is not true that those among us who say least are more devout and earnest than those whose hearts are nearer to their lips. There is a pleasant self-complacency in this explanation of the matter, and it becomes all of us who have been accustomed to use it, to ask whether we cannot find a less creditable cause for our silence.

Would it not be possible to try whether the conversation at our Christmas parties might not

be cheerful, playful, and even merry, and yet not altogether frivolous and useless? There would be this advantage, at least, in giving religious people a chance of talking about religion—the conversation would assume a higher intellectual character. They know more, and think more, about religion than about most other subjects, except their families and their business. They are more interested in religious truth than in any other truth. If once they could speak about it freely, they would speak their best. Anyhow, might not certain forms of Christian work be talked of when Christian men meet together? Are not the difficulties of town missions at least as interesting as the blunders of town councils? Is not a ragged-school as good a subject of conversation as a new system of drainage? Would not the prospects of Christianity in India be as pleasant a topic of speculation as the future of the Italian kingdom? May not the condition of the poor of the neighbourhood suggest a more manly as well

as a more Christian discussion than the movements of the Prince of Wales? Is not the annual report of a great hospital a better thing to talk about than the gossip of the *Court Journal?* Might not the ethics of common business be as interesting a subject as the history of a financial panic and the chances of improvement in the shares of Joint-Stock Companies (*Limited*)?

My conviction is, that nine-tenths of religious people would say that an evening was all the pleasanter and more refreshing for the free discussion of questions like these. It is about these things, after all, that they really care; about half the topics on which dreary commonplaces are laboriously exchanged when a dozen men and women, not of the same family, have to spend four hours together, they care nothing.

But Christmas parties should never be given without thinking of those to whom the luxuries of life and its comforts are denied, and to whom

even the necessities of life are sparingly given. He whose birth we celebrate was born in a stable and cradled in a manger. In after years, He had not where to lay His head. It is in the life of the poor and the sorrowful that we see the external conditions of His history most nearly repeated. Literally to bring the lame, the halt, the blind, and the homeless to our tables, might be a very unreal mode of obeying His precept about the people whom we are to invite when we give a feast; but to forget them altogether must be directly against the spirit both of that particular command and of His uniform teaching and example. No acts of charity can make any Christmas Day, to some whom we all know, what the previous Christmas was. Commercial disasters, loss of work, prolonged sickness, cruel sorrows, death, have darkened and made desolate many a home which was bright as the brightest twelve months before. These should be remembered; and we should regard it

as the best and noblest celebration of the Christmas festival, to attempt to alleviate their gloom. Nor should those whose whole life has been mean, wretched, and miserable be forgotten. Even transient acts of mercy to the outcast and the abandoned may, in some happy instances, prove to be like the passing gleam of that angelic glory which came upon the shepherds eighteen centuries ago, and may seem to speak to them, in accents of irresistible tenderness, of that infinite goodness which found its supreme manifestation in the Life which began at Bethlehem in the obscurest poverty, and ended on Calvary in public shame. The best "blessing" for a Christmas dinner is tha invoked by the aged, the lonely, and the destitute on those who have tried to make one day, at least, in the three hundred and sixty-five a festival, not for themselves alone, but for their less fortunate neighbours.

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